



ILLICIT FENTANYL DHS Has Various Efforts to Combat Trafficking but Could Better Assess Effectiveness

Report to Congressional Committees

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GAO Highlights

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Highlights of [GAO-25-107667](#), a report to congressional committees

ILLCIT FENTANYL

DHS Has Various Efforts to Combat Trafficking but Could Better Assess Effectiveness

Why GAO Did This Study

DHS is responsible for securing the nation's borders against the trafficking of drugs. This includes illicit fentanyl, which continues to be the primary cause of overdose deaths in the U.S. The James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2023 requires DHS to, among other things, establish a program to collect data and develop measures to assess the effectiveness of efforts to detect and deter illicit fentanyl, including its analogues and precursor chemicals, from being trafficked into the U.S. The Act includes a provision for GAO to review the data collected and measures developed by DHS's program.

This report examines (1) DHS data on seizures of illicit fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment from FY 2021 through 2024; (2) DHS efforts to combat the trafficking of these items into the U.S.; and (3) the extent DHS has assessed the effectiveness of its efforts. GAO analyzed DHS, CBP, and HSI documents and data on fentanyl-related seizures and investigations for FY 2021 through 2024. GAO also interviewed DHS, CBP, and HSI officials, including CBP and HSI field officials during visits to four locations.

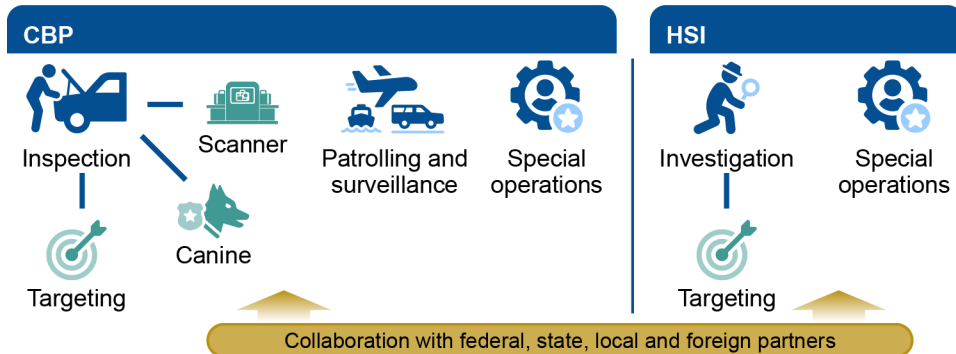
What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DHS (1) establish a statutorily required program to collect data and develop measures to assess efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking into the U.S., (2) ensure the entity it tasks with establishing the program has access to needed information, and (3) develop performance goals and measures for its strategic goals. DHS concurred with the recommendations.

What GAO Found

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) components—primarily U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI)—led or assisted on the seizure of almost 460,000 pounds of fentanyl and chemicals used to make fentanyl (precursors) and 10,000 pieces of equipment used to make fentanyl pills (production equipment) from fiscal years (FY) 2021 through 2024. DHS conducts various efforts to combat the trafficking of fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment into the U.S. through CBP and HSI. Specifically, CBP inspects incoming travelers and shipments and patrols and surveils the border; and HSI investigates bad actors and transnational criminal organizations. CBP and HSI also conduct special operations to disrupt fentanyl-related supply chains and collaborate with federal, state, local, and foreign law enforcement partners.

Department of Homeland Security Component Efforts and Tools to Combat Fentanyl Trafficking



Legend Efforts Tools

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) information; Icons-Studio/stock.adobe.com; ylivdesign/stock.adobe.com (scanner icon). | GAO-25-107667

DHS analyzes and reports data on its efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking, but its ability to fully assess the effectiveness of its efforts is limited. This is because it has not established a statutorily required program and incorporated key performance management practices. Specifically, DHS has not established a program to collect data and develop measures to assess the effectiveness of efforts to combat the trafficking of illicit fentanyl, including synthetic opioids with chemical structures related to fentanyl (analogues) and precursor chemicals, into the U.S., as required by law. DHS tasked CBP with establishing the program, but CBP does not have access to the information it needs to do so, such as other components' data and measures. By establishing the required program, DHS would be better positioned to assess the effectiveness of its efforts. Additionally, DHS has not developed performance goals and measures related to its strategic goals for its efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking. By developing performance goals for its strategic goals as well as measures for those performance goals, which could be established through the statutorily required program, DHS would be better positioned to assess progress toward achieving its long-term goals.

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Abbreviations

AMO	Air and Marine Operations
CBP	U.S. Customs and Border Protection 3,100
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
HSI	Homeland Security Investigations
ICE	Office of Field Operations
OFO	Office of Field Operations

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September 2, 2025

Congressional Committees

Fentanyl continues to be the primary cause of overdose deaths across the country. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that in 2024 there were about 48,000 synthetic opioid overdose deaths—primarily fentanyl—in the U.S., accounting for 60 percent of all overdose deaths. Fentanyl is 100 times more potent than morphine and 50 times more potent than heroin. As a result, a very small amount of fentanyl or its analogues can increase the risk of overdose.¹ According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, 2 milligrams of fentanyl—the size of a few grains of sand—can cause a lethal overdose.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has an important role in national efforts to prevent drug misuse, which has been a persistent public health issue in the U.S.² DHS is the lead federal agency for securing the nation's borders against the trafficking of drugs, including illicit fentanyl.³ The two primary DHS components involved in combating the trafficking of illicit fentanyl into the U.S. are (1) U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and (2) U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).⁴

The James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 included a provision for us to review DHS efforts to collect data and develop measures to assess the effectiveness of technologies and strategies used to detect and deter illicit fentanyl, including its analogues and precursor chemicals, from being trafficked into the U.S. at and between ports of entry.⁵ This report examines (1) what DHS data show about seizures of illicit fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment from fiscal years 2021 through 2024; (2) DHS efforts to combat the trafficking of illicit fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production

¹Fentanyl analogues are synthetic opioids with chemical structures related to fentanyl. The potency of fentanyl analogues is often unknown because they have not been evaluated. However, they can range from less potent than fentanyl to much more potent. One of the most potent known fentanyl analogues—carfentanil—is estimated to be 10,000 times more potent than morphine.

²Drug misuse is the use of illicit drugs and the misuse of prescription drugs. In 2021, we included drug misuse on our High-Risk List, noting that federal agencies must effectively implement a strategic national response to drug misuse and make progress toward reducing rates of drug misuse and the resulting harmful effects to society. In our February 2025 update to the list, we reported that federal agencies made progress on this high-risk area. See GAO, *High-Risk Series: Heightened Attention Could Save Billions More and Improve Government Efficiency and Effectiveness*, [GAO-25-107743](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 25, 2025).

³According to DHS, the U.S. has approximately 6,000 miles of land borders and 95,000 miles of coastline.

⁴6 U.S.C. §§ 211 (establishment of CBP), 252 (establishment of ICE). The U.S. Coast Guard, a multi-mission military service within DHS, leads maritime drug interdiction efforts and has broad legal authorities to conduct counterdrug missions. See, generally, 14 U.S.C. §§ 521-528 (lifesaving and law enforcement authorities); see also 6 U.S.C. § 468; 10 U.S.C. § 279. However, our review did not include the Coast Guard because the agency has reported few interdictions of fentanyl in the maritime environment. Further, we have ongoing work examining the Coast Guard's drug and migrant interdiction efforts and plan to report on the results of that work later in 2025.

⁵Pub. L. No. 117-263, div. G, title LXXI, subtitle D, § 7136(b)(4)(B), 136 Stat. 2395, 3651 (classified at 6 U.S.C. § 225(b)(4)(B)). In this report, for the purpose of readability, we use the term "measures" which we and the Office of Management and Budget have found to be generally interchangeable with "metrics," the term used in the Act. A precursor chemical is any chemical substance that may be used in any part of the manufacturing process of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances such as fentanyl and fentanyl analogues.

equipment into the U.S.; and (3) the extent to which DHS has assessed the effectiveness of its efforts to combat the trafficking of illicit fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment into the U.S.⁶

To address our first two objectives, we analyzed data on seizures of fentanyl, its analogues and precursor chemicals, and production equipment that occurred during fiscal years 2021 through 2024 from CBP's SEACATS and U.S. Border Patrol's e3.⁷ To assess the reliability of these data, we performed electronic testing, reviewed information about the systems, compared the data to CBP's public reports, and interviewed agency officials. We found these data to be sufficiently reliable for the purpose of describing (1) the total amount and number of fentanyl, fentanyl analogue, fentanyl precursor chemical, and production equipment seizures led and assisted by DHS and each of the DHS components with primary responsibility for combating drug trafficking at and between U.S. ports entry; and (2) the minimum amount and number of fentanyl, fentanyl analogue, fentanyl precursor chemical, and production equipment seizures that involved the use of targeting, canines, and non-intrusive inspection equipment from fiscal years 2021 through 2024.⁸

To describe DHS efforts to combat the trafficking of illicit fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment into the U.S., we reviewed documentation from DHS, CBP, and ICE's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), including counter-fentanyl plans or strategies. We also analyzed summary-level data on fentanyl-related cases, indictments, arrests, convictions, disruptions, and dismantlements for fiscal years 2021 through 2024 from HSI's Investigative Case Management system.⁹ To assess the reliability of these data, we performed logic testing, reviewed information about the system, and interviewed agency officials. We found these data to be sufficiently reliable for the purpose of reporting the total and average annual number of fentanyl-related HSI cases, indictments, arrests, convictions, disruptions, and dismantlements from fiscal years 2021 through 2024.

In addition, we interviewed CBP and HSI officials from headquarters and the field to better understand CBP and HSI efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking. Specifically, in the field, we interviewed CBP officials from locations in California and Arizona and HSI officials from locations in California, Arizona, and Texas.¹⁰ We conducted most of these interviews during in-person visits to Los Angeles and San Diego, California and

⁶Fentanyl, fentanyl analogues, fentanyl precursor chemicals, and production equipment have legitimate, legal uses. This report presents data and information related to DHS efforts to combat the trafficking of illicit fentanyl, fentanyl analogues, fentanyl precursor chemicals, and production equipment into the U.S. In this report, when we refer to fentanyl, we are referring to both fentanyl and its analogues. We are including production equipment in our scope because DHS has focused its interdiction efforts on the tools needed to make fentanyl, such as pill press machines and parts and die molds. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, drug traffickers use pill presses to press fentanyl into pills and punches and die molds to imprint markings and logos onto those pills to produce pills that look like legitimate prescription medication.

⁷We selected this time frame because CBP officials told us they began collecting more precise data on production equipment seizures in fiscal year 2021 and fiscal year 2024 is the most recent year for which complete data were available at the time of our review. SEACATS is the official system of record for tracking all drug seizures made by CBP and ICE's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI). Border Patrol's e3 is an application used to collect and transmit data related to its law enforcement activities, including drug seizures.

⁸We report the minimum number of seizures and amounts involving these tools because the fields that we reviewed in SEACATS to identify the use of these tools were not required to be completed or were free-text narratives. CBP uses various types of non-intrusive inspection equipment to screen travelers, vehicles, and shipments coming into the U.S. This equipment includes small-scale handheld devices and large-scale systems designed to help CBP officials detect drugs and other illicit items without requiring them to conduct a physical inspection.

⁹HSI's Investigative Case Management system is the official system of record used to initiate cases, identify case categories, and record and report substantive case information such as arrests, indictments, and convictions.

¹⁰We interviewed officials from two HSI special operations focused on disrupting the fentanyl supply chain that are based in Texas.

Tucson, Arizona.¹¹ During these visits, we observed CBP efforts and tools to combat fentanyl trafficking at three land ports of entry, an international mail facility, air and sea cargo examination facilities, and two immigration checkpoints. The information we obtained from these interviews and visits cannot be generalized; however, it provided valuable insights on CBP and HSI efforts and tools to combat fentanyl trafficking.

To determine the extent to which DHS assessed the effectiveness of its efforts to combat the trafficking of illicit fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment into the U.S., we reviewed DHS, CBP, and HSI documents describing agency goals, measures, and performance and interviewed DHS headquarters officials and the CBP and HSI headquarters and field officials cited above. We evaluated DHS's efforts to assess its effectiveness at combating fentanyl trafficking against DHS's *Organizational Performance Management Guidance*, GAO's guide on evidence-based policymaking, and select key performance management practices identified in our prior work.¹²

We also interviewed or obtained responses to questions from officials from DHS's Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans and Office of the Executive Secretary as well as CBP's Office of Field Operations (OFO), Office of the Executive Secretariat, and Office of Congressional Affairs to determine the status of DHS's establishment of a statutorily required program to collect data and develop measures to assess the effectiveness of efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking into the U.S.¹³ We evaluated DHS's establishment of the required program against the applicable statutory provisions and select leading practices for interagency collaboration such as ensuring participants in a collaborative effort have access to the information needed to assess progress toward agreed-upon outcomes.¹⁴ See appendix I for a more detailed explanation of our scope and methodology.

We conducted this performance audit from June 2024 to September 2025 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

¹¹We selected San Diego and Tucson because, according to CBP's public drug seizure data, these locations had the greatest number of CBP fentanyl seizures and pounds of fentanyl seized in fiscal year 2023. We selected Los Angeles because the Acting CBP Commissioner at the time of our review identified the Los Angeles International Airport—which includes CBP international mail and cargo examination facilities—as the focal point in the agency's efforts to combat fentanyl precursor chemicals.

¹²DHS, *Section 5.0 – DHS Organizational Performance Management Guidance*, (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 23, 2023). GAO, *Evidence-Based Policymaking: Practices to Help Manage and Assess the Results of Federal Efforts*, [GAO-23-105460](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 12, 2023). In our prior work, we identified three key steps and additional practices within each step that federal agencies can implement to improve their overall performance. See [GAO-23-105460](#) and GAO, *Executive Guide: Effectively Implementing the Government Performance and Results Act*, [GAO/GGD-96-118](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 1996).

¹³Pub. L. No. 117-263, div. G, title LXXI, subtitle D, § 7136(b), 136 Stat. 2395, 3650-51 (classified at 6 U.S.C. § 225(b)). This Act requires the Secretary of Homeland Security, in consultation with the Attorney General, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and the Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, to (1) establish a program to collect data and develop measures to assess the effectiveness of technologies and strategies used to detect and deter illicit fentanyl, including analogues and precursor chemicals, from being trafficked into the U.S. at and between ports of entry; and (2) submit to Congress a report that is based on the data collected and measures developed by the required program 1 year after the enactment of the Act and every 2 years thereafter.

¹⁴GAO, *Government Performance Management: Leading Practices to Enhance Interagency Collaboration and Address Crosscutting Challenges*, [GAO-23-105520](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 24, 2023).

Background

DHS Component Responsibilities for Combating Fentanyl Trafficking into the U.S.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection

Among other responsibilities, CBP is responsible for stopping the unlawful movement of people, drugs, chemicals, and other contraband across U.S. borders.¹⁵ In October 2023, CBP released its *Strategy to Combat Fentanyl and Other Synthetic Drugs* and established the Fentanyl Campaign Directorate to oversee the implementation of the strategy and facilitate coordination within CBP and with other federal, state, local, international, and industry partners. According to CBP, its strategy helps develop a whole-of-government and international effort to anticipate, identify, mitigate, and disrupt fentanyl producers, suppliers, and traffickers.

Within CBP, three components—OFO, Border Patrol, and Air and Marine Operations (AMO)—have primary responsibility for border security, which includes seizing drugs discovered during inspections and operations in their various areas of responsibility.

- OFO is responsible for inspecting people, vehicles, international mail,¹⁶ and cargo at more than 320 air, land, and sea ports of entry.¹⁷
- Border Patrol is responsible for securing U.S. borders between ports of entry, including at more than 110 immigration checkpoints on U.S. highways and secondary roads, generally located between 25 and 100 miles inland from the southwest and northern borders.¹⁸
- AMO is responsible for securing U.S. borders between ports of entry in the air, marine, and land environments.¹⁹ AMO uses air and maritime assets (e.g., aircraft and vessels) to help detect drug threats

¹⁵See 6 U.S.C. § 211(a), which establishes CBP within DHS, and (c), which enumerates CBP's duties.

¹⁶Inbound international mail generally arrives in the U.S. via five International Service Centers located in New York City, New York; Miami, Florida; Los Angeles, California; San Francisco, California; and Chicago, Illinois. Ground handlers employed by air carriers transport the mail to be accepted by the U.S. Postal Service, after which it is presented to CBP for inspection. Express cargo is handled by express consignment operators such as FedEx and the United Parcel Service. CBP inspects express cargo at offsite airport facilities or at major carriers' hub locations. In December 2019, we reported on U.S. Postal Service and CBP efforts to target international mail inspections to find illicit opioids, such as fentanyl. See GAO, *International Mail: Progress Made in Using Electronic Data to Detect Illegal Opioid Shipments, but Additional Steps Remain*, [GAO-20-229R](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 18, 2019). In this report, we recommended that DHS establish and implement a time frame for completing its drafting of advance electronic data regulations and submitting them to the Office of Management and Budget for further review. DHS implemented this recommendation in August 2020.

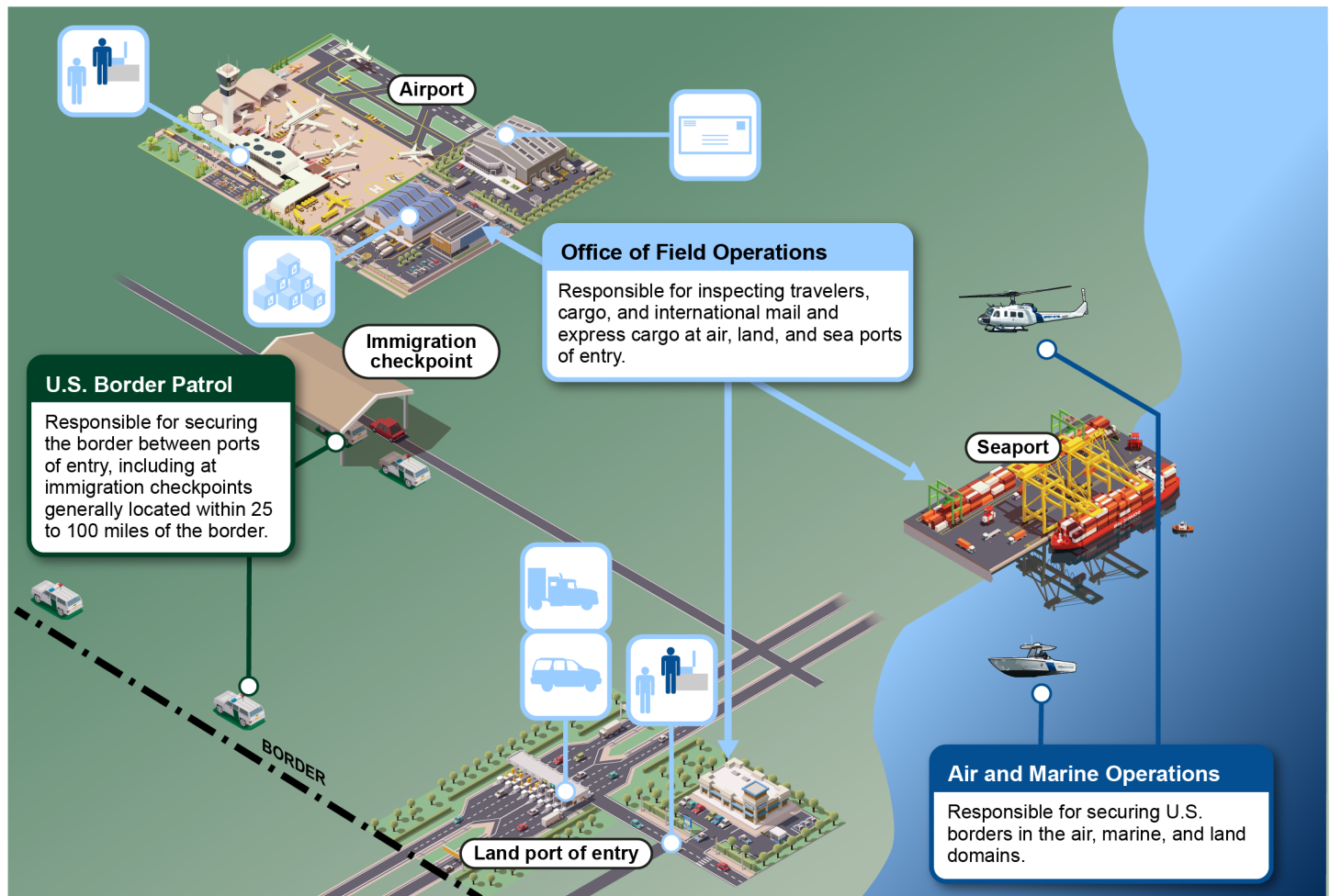
¹⁷Ports of entry are facilities that provide for the controlled entry into, or departure from, the U.S. Specifically, a port of entry is any officially designated location (seaport, airport, or land border location) where CBP officers or employees clear travelers, goods, and other items, collect duties, and enforce customs laws; and where officers inspect persons applying for admission into, entering, or departing the U.S. pursuant to U.S. immigration and travel controls.

¹⁸According to Border Patrol, the purpose of immigration checkpoints is to detect and apprehend (1) removable people, including smuggled humans; (2) human and drug (or other contraband) smugglers; and (3) suspected terrorists attempting to travel into the interior of the U.S. after evading detection at the border. For additional information on Border Patrol's use of immigration checkpoints, see GAO, *Border Patrol: Actions Needed to Improve Checkpoint Oversight and Data*, [GAO-22-104568](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 6, 2022).

¹⁹CBP's AMO has 14 field branches, which are divided into units that conduct air and marine missions.

and provide support to drug interdiction efforts. See figure 1 for an illustration of examples of CBP components' operating locations where they typically seize drugs.

Figure 1: Examples of CBP Operating Locations Where Drugs Are Typically Seized



Sources: GAO analysis of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) information; Taras Livvy/stock.adobe.com (illustrations); GAO (icons). | GAO-25-107667

Additional entities within CBP assist OFO, Border Patrol, and AMO with their drug seizure responsibilities by identifying and sharing information on high-risk travelers and shipments—also referred to as targeting—and monitoring and sharing drug-related intelligence and trends in the field. For example:

- OFO's National Targeting Center provides advance information about high-risk travelers and shipments—including suspected drugs—to ports of entry. The center also targets shipments of fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment, and analyzes intelligence to identify the organizations involved in trafficking, producing, and distributing these items and other synthetic drugs.
- Field targeting and intelligence units conduct drug targeting and monitor drug seizure trends in the field.
- CBP's Office of Trade provides agency personnel with trade-related intelligence and analytics to help target people and organizations involved in drug trafficking.

- CBP's Office of Intelligence develops, coordinates, and implements the agency's intelligence capabilities and provides agency personnel with intelligence on drug-related threats and trends. According to CBP officials, the Office of Intelligence has eight Regional Intelligence Centers—five along the southern border and three along the northern border—responsible for producing information for CBP field units on threats within their area of responsibility.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

ICE enforces federal laws governing border control, customs, trade, and immigration.²⁰ Among other responsibilities, ICE's HSI is responsible for investigating the illicit movement of goods, including drugs, into and out of the country.²¹ HSI special agents, who are deployed to over 230 domestic offices and 90 international offices, are responsible for collecting and developing evidence to identify and advance criminal cases against transnational criminal organizations and other threats to the homeland.²² HSI's Narcotics and Contraband Smuggling Unit is responsible for overseeing matters related to counternarcotics investigations with a connection to the U.S. border. This unit is also responsible for managing the day-to-day implementation of HSI's *Strategy for Combating Illicit Opioids*. This strategy, which HSI released in September 2023, details the agency's plan for disrupting the supply of illicit fentanyl and other opioids fueling the overdose epidemic.

DHS Components Conducted About 15,000 Fentanyl-Related Seizures from Fiscal Years 2021 Through 2024, Totaling Over 150,000 Pounds Seized

DHS Components Seized Almost 161,000 Pounds of Fentanyl and Its Precursor Chemicals and 9,800 Pieces of Production Equipment

Our analysis of DHS seizure data shows that from fiscal years 2021 through 2024, DHS components conducted about 15,000 seizures resulting in about 99,500 pounds of fentanyl, 61,100 pounds of fentanyl precursor chemicals, and 9,800 pieces of production equipment being seized.²³ Over the same period, DHS components also assisted other federal, state, local, and foreign agencies on about 5,100 seizures that resulted in about 30,900 pounds of fentanyl, 265,500 pounds of fentanyl precursor chemicals, and 90 pieces of production equipment being seized.²⁴

²⁰See 6 U.S.C. § 252, which establishes ICE within DHS.

²¹Regarding ICE HSI's various statutory authorities, see, e.g., 6 U.S.C. §§ 242a, 252, 258, 473, 475.

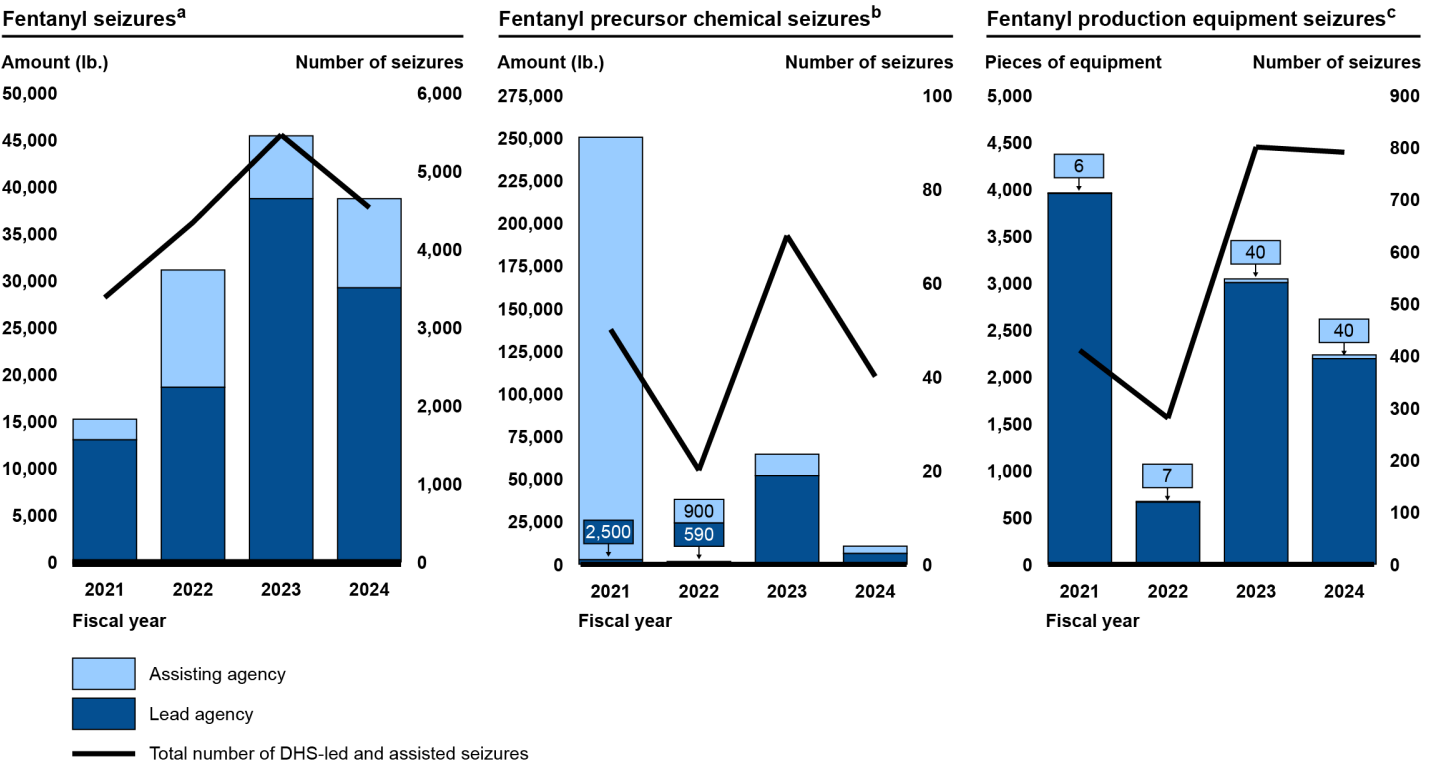
²²ICE defines a transnational criminal organization as a self-perpetuating association of individuals that operates across international borders for the purpose of obtaining power, influence, or monetary or commercial gains, wholly or in part by illegal means.

²³The amount of seized fentanyl represents the total weight of fentanyl powder, pills, and analogues, and may include other drugs or chemicals that were mixed with fentanyl or fentanyl analogues. The amount of seized fentanyl precursor chemicals represents the weight of chemicals that are or could be used to produce illicit fentanyl, according to CBP's Laboratories and Scientific Services, other federal agencies, and international entities. The amount of seized production equipment represents the total number of pill presses, dies, and parts.

²⁴These data include about 570 seizures from Border Patrol's e3.

As shown in figure 2, DHS components seized more fentanyl, fentanyl precursor chemicals, and production equipment as the lead agency from fiscal years 2023 through 2024 than they did from fiscal years 2021 through 2022. According to CBP officials, CBP’s implementation of special operations, which we describe later in this report, contributed to this increase. CBP began these operations in March 2023 to provide more resources to interdict fentanyl, fentanyl precursor chemicals, and production equipment at select border locations.

Figure 2: Amount and Number of Illicit Fentanyl, Fentanyl Precursor Chemical, and Production Equipment Seizures on Which DHS Was a Lead and Assisting Agency, Fiscal Years 2021–2024



Source: GAO analysis of data from U.S. Customs and Border Protection’s (CBP) SEACATS and U.S. Border Patrol’s e3. | GAO-25-107667

Fiscal year	Fentanyl seizure amount (in lb.) lead agency	Fentanyl seizure amount (in lb.) assisting agency	Number of fentanyl seizures	Fentanyl precursor chemical seizure amount (in lb.) lead agency	Fentanyl precursor chemical seizure amount (in lb.) assisting agency	Number of fentanyl precursor chemical seizures	Fentanyl production equipment seizures (pieces)	Fentanyl production equipment seizures (pieces) lead agency	Number of fentanyl precursor equipment seizures assisting agency
2021	13000	2200	3380	2500	247700	50	3950	6	410
2022	18600	12500	4340	590	900	20	660	7	280
2023	38700	6700	5460	51800	12600	70	3000	40	800
2024	29200	9500	4530	6200	4300	40	2190	40	790

Notes: The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) led a seizure if a DHS entity was identified as the main seizing agency in SEACATS, which is the official system of record for tracking all DHS drug seizures. DHS assisted a seizure if a DHS entity was identified as a participating agency and not the main seizing agency in SEACATS or Border Patrol’s e3, which agents use to collect and transmit data related to its law enforcement activities, including

drug seizures. The data for DHS-assisted seizures include about 570 seizures from e3. Agents are required to transfer all Border Patrol drug seizures into SEACATS but do not typically transfer seizures on which Border Patrol assisted another agency conducting a seizure. We rounded amounts of pounds seized above 1,000 to the nearest 100 pounds and amounts between 10 and 1,000 to the nearest 10 pounds. We rounded amounts of production equipment seized above 10 to the nearest 10 pieces. We rounded numbers of seizures above 10 to the nearest 10 seizures.

^aThe amount of seized fentanyl represents the total weight of fentanyl powder, pills, and analogues, and may include other drugs or chemicals that were mixed with fentanyl or fentanyl analogues. The number of seizures represents the total number of seizures of fentanyl, fentanyl analogues, and other drugs or chemicals that were mixed with fentanyl or fentanyl analogues. DHS components led or assisted on about 80 seizures of fentanyl analogues resulting in about 180 pounds seized from fiscal years 2021 through 2024.

^bThe amount of seized fentanyl precursor chemicals represents the weight of chemicals that are or could be used to produce illicit fentanyl, according to CBP's Laboratories and Scientific Services, other federal agencies, and international entities. If a seizure contained fentanyl precursor chemicals and fentanyl or fentanyl analogues, we counted that seizure in our analysis of fentanyl seizures. From fiscal years 2021 through 2024, DHS components led or assisted on about 60 seizures that contained fentanyl precursor chemicals and fentanyl or fentanyl analogues. The data for fiscal year 2021 include two DHS component-assisted fentanyl precursor chemical seizures of about 114,300 pounds each.

^cThe amount of seized production equipment represents the total number of pill presses, dies, and parts.

Our analysis of DHS seizure data shows that CBP's OFO seized the most fentanyl, fentanyl precursor chemicals, and production equipment among DHS components from fiscal years 2021 through 2024. Table 1 presents data on fentanyl-related seizures for DHS components except CBP's AMO, which supports the efforts of other DHS components and other federal, state, and local agencies but does not lead drug interdiction efforts. See appendix II for our analysis of DHS data on component-assisted seizures from fiscal years 2021 through 2024.

Table 1: Number and Amount of Illicit Fentanyl, Fentanyl Precursor Chemical, and Production Equipment Seizures by CBP Components and HSI, Fiscal Years 2021–2024

		2021		2022		2023		2024	
Component		Number of seizures	Amount	Number of seizures	Amount	Number of seizures	Amount	Number of seizures	Amount
Fentanyl (lb.) ^a	OFO	1,350	9,100	1,100	11,100	1,050	24,700	730	17,600
	Border Patrol	190	640	300	1,800	290	2,700	310	3,100
	HSI	1,040	3,200	1,760	5,700	2,530	11,300	1,950	8,500
Fentanyl precursor chemicals (lb.) ^b	OFO	40	2,300	20	600	40	44,900	30	6,100
	Border Patrol	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	HSI	6	230	-	-	20	6,900	3	70
Production equipment (pieces) ^c	OFO	380	3,900	260	650	450	1,700	730	2,070
	Border Patrol	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	HSI	20	50	10	10	330	1,300	40	120

Source: GAO analysis of data from U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) SEACATS. | GAO-25-107667

Notes: A component led a seizure if it was identified as the main seizing agency in SEACATS, which is the official system of record for tracking all CBP and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) drug seizures. Three CBP components—the Office of Field Operations (OFO), Border Patrol, and Air and Marine Operations (AMO)—have primary responsibility for border security, which includes drug interdiction efforts. AMO supports the efforts of other Department of Homeland Security (DHS) components and other federal, state, local, and foreign agencies, but does not lead drug interdiction efforts. We rounded amounts of pounds seized above 1,000 to the nearest 100 pounds and amounts between 10 and 1,000 to the nearest 10 pounds. We rounded amounts of production equipment seized above 10 to the nearest 10 pieces. We rounded numbers of seizures above 10 to the nearest 10 seizures.

^aThe amount of seized fentanyl represents the total weight of fentanyl powder, pills, and analogues, and may include other drugs or chemicals that were mixed with fentanyl or fentanyl analogues. The number of seizures represents the total number of seizures of fentanyl, fentanyl analogues, and other drugs or chemicals that were mixed with fentanyl or fentanyl analogues. DHS components conducted about 80 seizures of fentanyl analogues resulting in about 180 pounds seized from fiscal years 2021 through 2024.

^bThe amount of seized fentanyl precursor chemicals represents the weight of chemicals that are or could be used to produce illicit fentanyl, according to CBP's Laboratories and Scientific Services, other federal agencies, and international entities. If a seizure contained fentanyl precursor chemicals and fentanyl or fentanyl analogues, we counted that seizure in our analysis of fentanyl seizures. A “-” means that all relevant seizures contained fentanyl or fentanyl analogues. From fiscal years 2021 through 2024, OFO conducted two seizures of fentanyl precursor chemicals that also contained fentanyl or fentanyl analogues. HSI conducted about 60 such seizures over the same period.

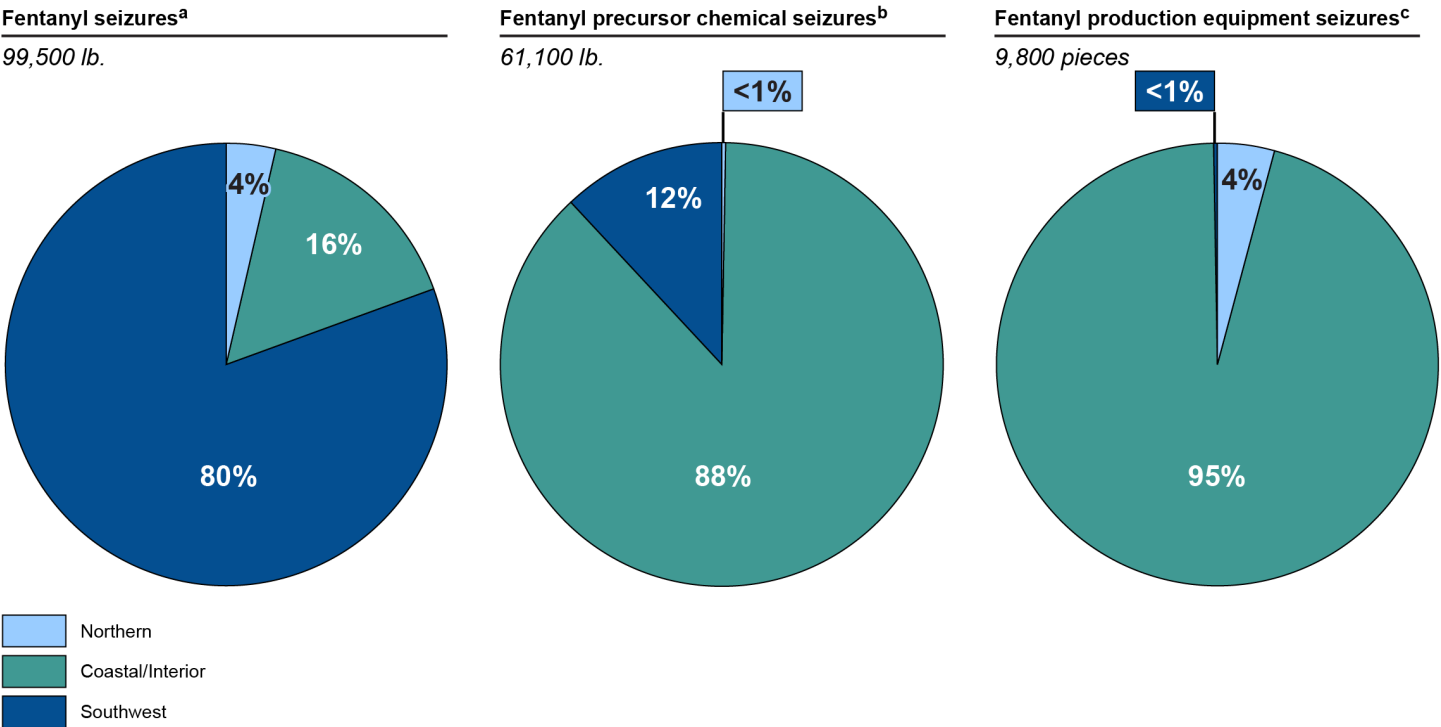
^cThe amount of seized production equipment represents the total number of pill presses, dies, and parts.

Most Fentanyl Was Seized in the Southwest Border Region and the Majority of Fentanyl and Related Items Were Seized at Ports of Entry

Region of DHS Fentanyl-Related Seizures

Our analysis of DHS seizure data shows that from fiscal years 2021 through 2024, about 80 percent of the fentanyl DHS components seized was in the southwest border region. As shown in figure 3, most of the fentanyl precursor chemicals (about 88 percent) and production equipment (about 95 percent) DHS components seized from fiscal years 2021 through 2024 was in the coastal and interior regions of the U.S.²⁵

Figure 3: Percentage of DHS Illicit Fentanyl, Fentanyl Precursor Chemical, and Production Equipment Seizures by Region, Fiscal Years 2021–2024



Source: GAO analysis of data from U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) SEACATS. | GAO-25-107667

	Amount	Northern percentage	Coastal/interior	Southwest
Fentanyl seizures ^a	99,500 lb.	4%	16%	80%
Fentanyl precursor chemical seizures ^b	61100 lb.	1%	88%	12%
Fentanyl production equipment seizures ^c	9800 pieces	4%	95%	21%

²⁵DHS components cannot conduct seizures outside of the U.S., but they assist foreign governments and law enforcement agencies with the interdiction of illicit items, including drugs. We provide examples of this collaboration later in this report.

Notes: We rounded the total amounts of pounds seized to the nearest 100 pounds and the total amount of production equipment seized to the nearest 10 pieces. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding. We used the same regions that CBP uses in its public drug seizure data—northern, coastal/interior, and southwest.

^aThe amount of seized fentanyl represents the total weight of fentanyl powder, pills, and analogues, and may include other drugs or chemicals that were mixed with fentanyl or fentanyl analogues. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) components seized about 180 pounds of fentanyl analogues from fiscal years 2021 through 2024.

^bThe amount of seized fentanyl precursor chemicals represents the weight of chemicals that are or could be used to produce illicit fentanyl, according to CBP's Laboratories and Scientific Services, other federal agencies, and international entities. If a seizure contained fentanyl precursor chemicals and fentanyl or fentanyl analogues, we counted that seizure in our analysis of fentanyl seizures. From fiscal years 2021 through 2024, DHS components led about 60 seizures that contained fentanyl precursor chemicals and fentanyl or fentanyl analogues.

^cThe amount of seized production equipment represents the total number of pill presses, dies, and parts.

Location of DHS Fentanyl-Related Seizures

Our analysis of DHS seizure data shows that from fiscal years 2021 through 2024, the majority of fentanyl (about 63 percent) and most fentanyl precursor chemicals and production equipment (about 88 percent and 85 percent, respectively) DHS components seized was at ports of entry.

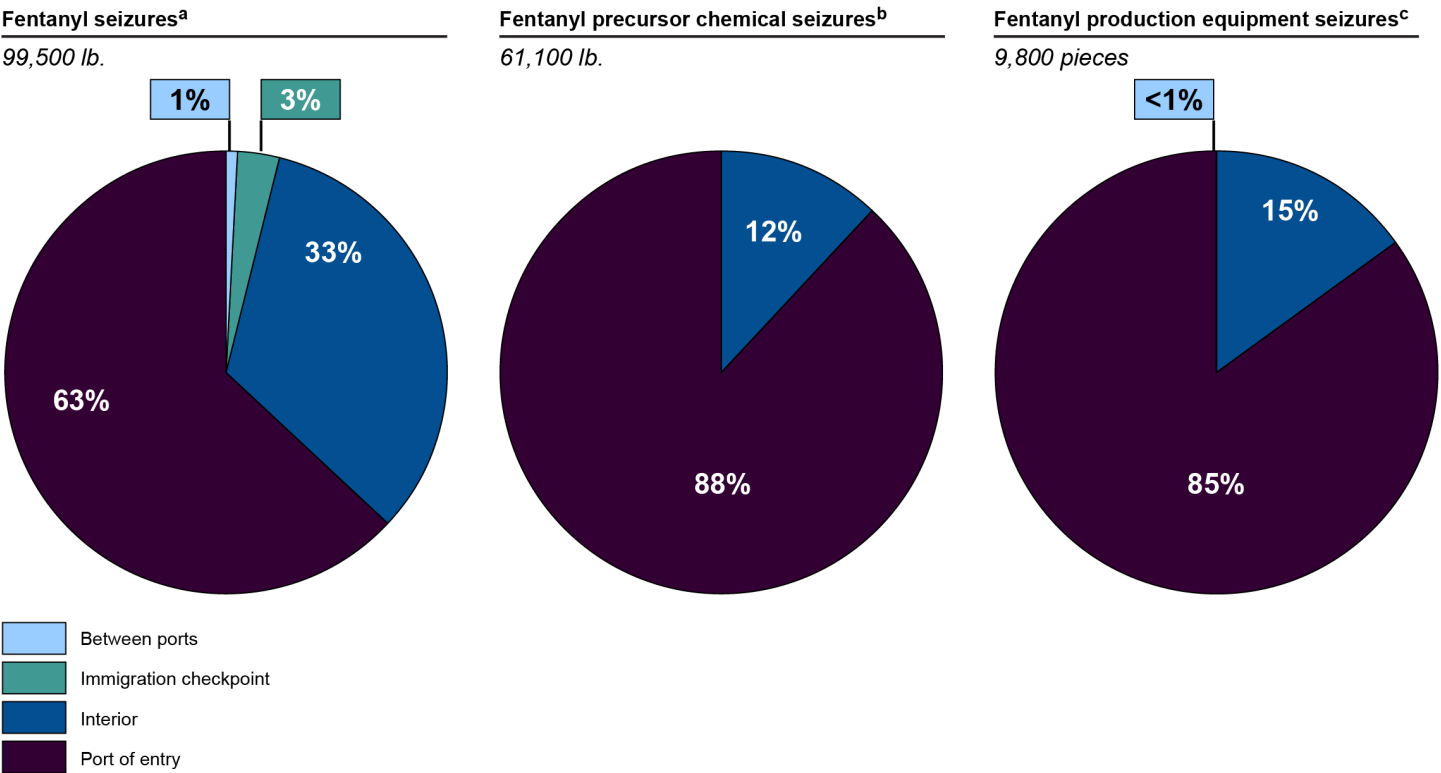
The ports of entry at which DHS components seized the largest amounts of fentanyl, fentanyl precursor chemicals, and production equipment from fiscal years 2021 through 2024 varied. Specifically, over that period, DHS components seized the largest amount of fentanyl at land ports of entry along the southwest border.²⁶ For example, of the fentanyl DHS components seized at ports of entry from fiscal years 2021 through 2024 (62,900 pounds), almost 70 percent was seized at three land ports of entry along the southwest border. In comparison, DHS components seized the largest amount of fentanyl precursor chemicals and production equipment from seaports, airports, and express consignment carrier facilities located across the country.²⁷ For example, of the fentanyl precursor chemicals and production equipment DHS components seized at ports of entry from fiscal years 2021 through 2024 (54,000 pounds and 8,300 pieces), over 90 percent of the precursors were seized at one seaport and two airports, and almost 55 percent of the equipment was seized at one seaport and two express consignment carrier facilities.

As shown in figure 4, most of the remaining fentanyl (about 33 percent), fentanyl precursor chemicals (about 12 percent), and production equipment (about 15 percent) was seized within the U.S. interior. Much of HSI's work to combat fentanyl trafficking, which we describe later in this report, takes place within the U.S. interior. More specifically, of the DHS component seizures that occurred within the U.S. interior, HSI accounted for about 85 percent of fentanyl seizures, all fentanyl precursor chemical seizures and almost all production equipment seizures.

²⁶CBP inspects hundreds of thousands of incoming passenger vehicles each day at land ports of entry.

²⁷CBP inspects inbound international mail or cargo at seaports, airports, and express consignment carrier facilities.

Figure 4: Percentage of DHS Illicit Fentanyl, Fentanyl Precursor Chemical, and Production Equipment Seizures by Location, Fiscal Years 2021–2024



Source: GAO analysis of data from U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) SEACATS. | GAO-25-107667

	Fentanyl seizures ^a	Fentanyl precursor chemical seizures ^b	Fentanyl production equipment seizures ^c
	99500 lbs	91100lb	9800 pieces
Between ports	1	0	<1
Immigration checkpoint	3	0	0
Interior	33	12	15
Port of entry	63	88	85

Notes: We rounded the total amounts of pounds seized to the nearest 100 pounds and the total amount of production equipment seized to the nearest 10 pieces. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding. Between port seizures occurred within the border area but not at a port of entry or immigration checkpoint. Interior seizures occurred beyond the border area within the U.S. interior.

^aThe amount of seized fentanyl represents the total weight of fentanyl powder, pills, and analogues, and may include other drugs or chemicals that were mixed with fentanyl or fentanyl analogues. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) components seized about 180 pounds of fentanyl analogues from fiscal years 2021 through 2024.

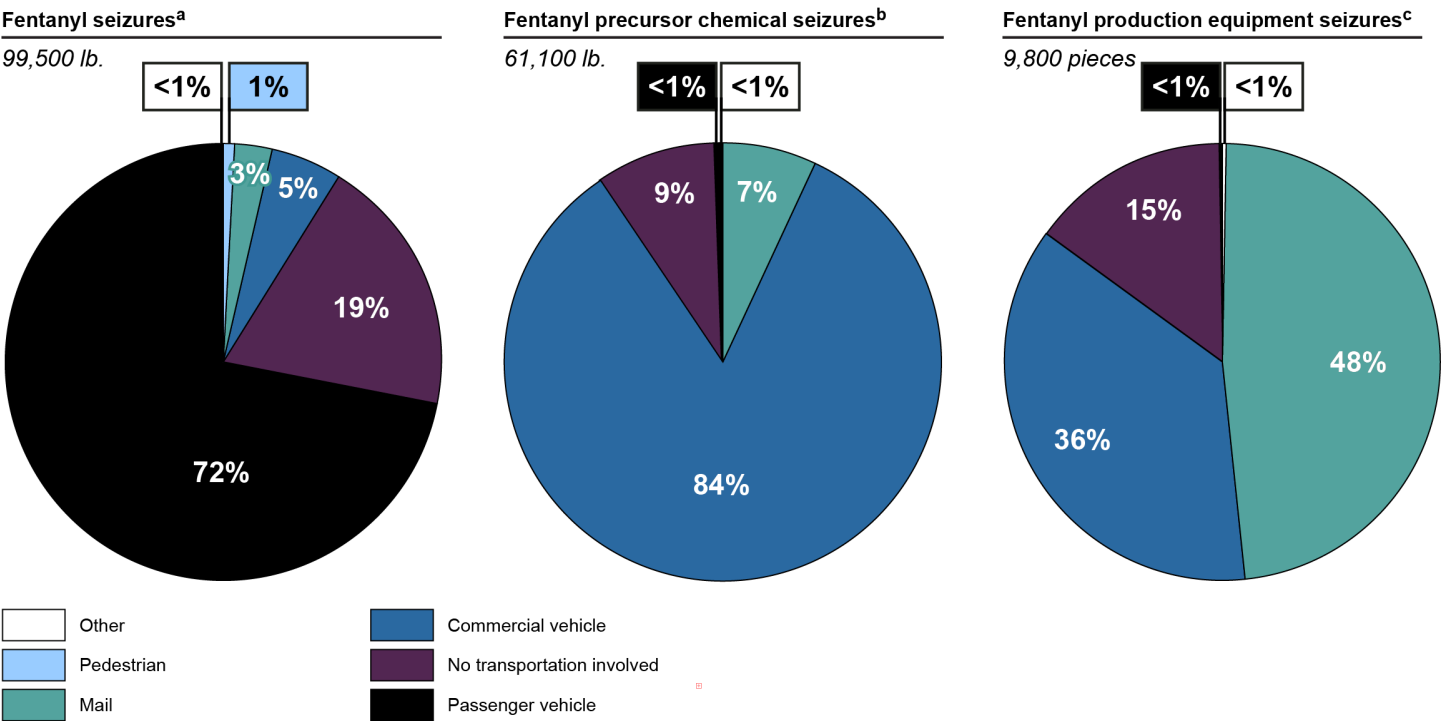
^bThe amount of seized fentanyl precursor chemicals represents the weight of chemicals that are or could be used to produce illicit fentanyl, according to CBP's Laboratories and Scientific Services, other federal agencies, and international entities. If a seizure contained fentanyl precursor chemicals and fentanyl or fentanyl analogues, we counted that seizure in our analysis of fentanyl seizures. From fiscal years 2021 through 2024, DHS components led about 60 seizures that contained fentanyl precursor chemicals and fentanyl or fentanyl analogues.

^cThe amount of seized production equipment represents the total number of pill presses, dies, and parts.

Seized Fentanyl and Related Items Were Transported Using a Variety of Methods and Came Primarily from Mexico or China

Our analysis of DHS seizure data shows that fentanyl, fentanyl precursor chemicals, and production equipment were transported into the U.S. using various methods and came primarily from either Mexico or China.²⁸ As shown in figure 5, from fiscal years 2021 through 2024, about 72 percent of fentanyl DHS components seized was transported by passenger vehicles, while about 84 percent of seized fentanyl precursor chemicals were transported by commercial vehicles—such as cargo trucks, ships, and planes—and 48 percent of seized production equipment was transported by mail.²⁹

Figure 5: Percentage of DHS Illicit Fentanyl, Fentanyl Precursor Chemical, and Production Equipment Seizures by Transportation Method, Fiscal Years 2021–2024



Source: GAO analysis of data from U.S. Customs and Border Protection’s (CBP) SEACATS. | GAO-25-107667

	Amount	Other	Pedestrian	Mail	Commercial vehicle	No transport involved	Passenger vehicle
Fentanyl seizures ^a	99,500 lb.	0.2%	0.8%	2.7%	5.3%	19.3%	71.8%
Fentanyl precursor chemical seizures ^b	61100 lb.	0.2%	0.0%	7.0%	84.0%	9.0%	0.3%

²⁸Officials may identify the country of origin for a seized item in SEACATS. According to CBP officials, it is not possible to determine a synthetic drug’s origin or point of manufacture with certainty. So, the country of origin field may not necessarily indicate the country in which a seized item was produced; it may indicate the country the seized item last traveled through.

²⁹According to CBP officials, items seized at cargo examination facilities at ports of entry were transported by commercial vehicles while items seized at international mail or express consignment carrier facilities were transported by mail.

	Amount	Other	Pedestrian	Mail	Commercial vehicle	No transport involved	Passenger vehicle
Fentanyl production equipment seizures ^c	9800 pieces	0.5%	0.0%	48.1%	36.5%	14.9%	0.1%

Notes: We rounded the total amounts of pounds seized to the nearest 100 pounds and the total amount of production equipment seized to the nearest 10 pieces. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding. Mail includes packages handled by express consignment carriers such as FedEx and the United Postal Service. Seizures for which there was no transportation involved reflects scenarios where an officer or agent seizes a drug outside of a mode of transportation, such as an abandoned drug.

^aThe amount of seized fentanyl represents the total weight of fentanyl powder, pills, and analogues, and may include other drugs or chemicals that were mixed with fentanyl or fentanyl analogues. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) components seized about 180 pounds of fentanyl analogues from fiscal years 2021 through 2024.

^bThe amount of seized fentanyl precursor chemicals represents the weight of chemicals that are or could be used to produce illicit fentanyl, according to CBP’s Laboratories and Scientific Services, other federal agencies, and international entities. If a seizure contained fentanyl precursor chemicals and fentanyl or fentanyl analogues, we counted that seizure in our analysis of fentanyl seizures. From fiscal years 2021 through 2024, DHS components led about 60 seizures that contained fentanyl precursor chemicals and fentanyl or fentanyl analogues.

^cThe amount of seized production equipment represents the total number of pill presses, dies, and parts.

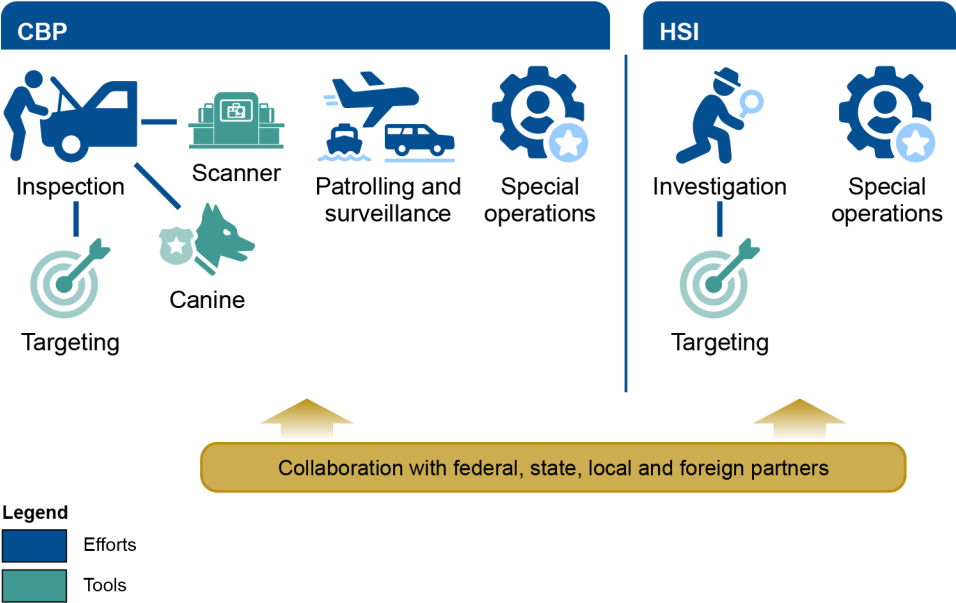
Our analysis of DHS seizure data shows that from fiscal years 2021 through 2024, the majority of fentanyl seized by DHS components (about 68 percent) came from Mexico. Most seized fentanyl precursor chemicals (about 84 percent) and production equipment (about 78 percent) came from China.³⁰ The results of our analysis align with the trafficking trends DHS and its components have identified. For example, according to DHS, CBP, and HSI documents, Mexico is the main source country for fentanyl and China is the main source country for fentanyl precursor chemicals. In addition, officials from CBP’s National Targeting Center identified China as the main source country for production equipment.

DHS Combats Fentanyl Trafficking Through CBP Inspections, Patrols, and Surveillance; HSI Investigations; and Collaborative Efforts

DHS combats the trafficking of fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment into the U.S. through various efforts. These include CBP inspections of travelers, vehicles, and shipments; CBP patrols and surveillance along the border; and ICE’s HSI investigations of bad actors and transnational criminal organizations. As shown in figure 6, CBP and HSI use various tools, such as targeting, to conduct inspections and investigations. In addition, CBP and HSI conduct special operations that focus agency personnel and resources on disrupting fentanyl-related supply chains. CBP’s and HSI’s efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking are enhanced through collaboration with other federal, state, local, and foreign law enforcement partners.

³⁰Approximately 24 percent of fentanyl, less than 1 percent of fentanyl precursor chemicals, and 3 percent of production equipment seized by DHS components had an unknown country of origin in SEACATS.

Figure 6: CBP's and HSI's Efforts and Tools to Combat Fentanyl Trafficking



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) information; Icons-Studio/stock.adobe.com; ylivdesign/stock.adobe.com (scanner icon). | GAO-25-107667

CBP Inspects Travelers, Vehicles, and Shipments; Patrols and Surveils the Border; and Conducts Special Operations to Combat Fentanyl Trafficking

CBP efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking include OFO and Border Patrol inspections at ports of entry and immigration checkpoints, respectively, as well as Border Patrol and AMO patrol and surveillance activities between ports of entry. In addition, CBP conducts special operations that provide additional resources for inspections and patrols at specific locations along the border.

Inspections. CBP's OFO inspects travelers, vehicles, and shipments at ports of entry and Border Patrol inspects travelers and their vehicles at immigration checkpoints using a variety of tools, including targeting, canines, and non-intrusive inspection equipment. CBP inspections involve a targeting process in which CBP uses intelligence and other information to identify and target higher-risk travelers, vehicles, and shipments for additional scrutiny at ports of entry and immigration checkpoints. CBP's National Targeting Center provides advance information and research about high-risk travelers, vehicles, and shipments to officials at ports of entry.

CBP field officials may also review seizure and arrest reports and other law enforcement information to identify travelers, vehicles, and shipments associated with known drug traffickers and place a "lookout" on them in CBP systems. A traveler, vehicle, or shipment with a "lookout" will receive additional scrutiny at ports of entry and immigration checkpoints.

Our analysis of DHS seizure data shows that from fiscal years 2021 through 2024, targeting contributed to at least 2,530 fentanyl-related seizures at ports of entry resulting in about 11,300 pounds of fentanyl, 50,900

pounds of fentanyl precursor chemicals, and 4,810 pieces of production equipment seized.³¹ Over the same period, targeting contributed to at least six fentanyl seizures at immigration checkpoints resulting in about 210 pounds seized.

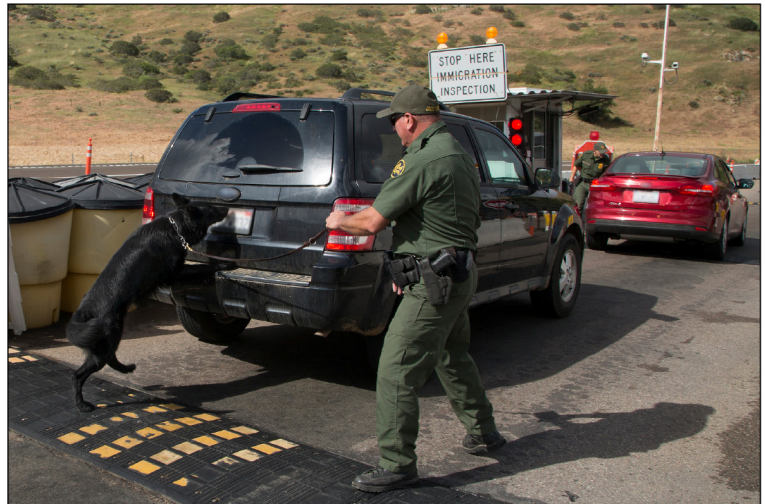
When inspecting travelers, vehicles, and shipments at some ports of entry and immigration checkpoints, CBP uses canines that are trained to detect various drugs, among other things. As shown in figure 7, CBP officials may use canines to inspect passenger vehicles before and after they question the driver and any passengers. Our analysis of DHS seizure data shows that from fiscal years 2021 through 2024, OFO canines contributed to at least 2,280 fentanyl-related seizures at ports of entry resulting in about 46,800 pounds of fentanyl and 200 pounds of fentanyl precursor chemicals seized.³² From fiscal years 2021 through 2024, Border Patrol canines contributed to at least 140 fentanyl seizures at immigration checkpoints resulting in about 2,000 pounds seized.³³

Figure 7: Selected Images of CBP Canines Inspecting Vehicles at a Port of Entry and Immigration Checkpoint



Canine inspecting a passenger vehicle at a port of entry after questioning by CBP officials.

Source: GAO (left) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) (right). | GAO-25-107667



Canine inspecting a passenger vehicle at an immigration checkpoint before questioning by CBP officials.

CBP also uses various types of non-intrusive inspection equipment to screen travelers, vehicles, and shipments coming into the U.S. This equipment includes small-scale handheld devices and large-scale systems designed to help CBP officials detect drugs and other illicit items without requiring them to conduct a

³¹We report the minimum number of seizures and amounts involving targeting, canines, and non-intrusive inspection equipment because the fields that we reviewed in SEACATS to identify CBP's use of these tools in its inspection efforts were not required fields or were free-text narratives.

³²All of OFO's narcotics and human smuggling canines are trained to detect fentanyl. In September 2024, OFO completed a pilot program to train canines to detect select fentanyl precursor chemicals.

³³Our analysis of DHS seizure data shows that from fiscal years 2021 through 2024, Border Patrol canines were also used in at least 30 fentanyl seizures in areas between ports of entry resulting in about 300 pounds seized and at least 280 fentanyl seizures in the U.S. interior resulting in about 2,700 pounds seized. Border Patrol canines are not trained to detect fentanyl, fentanyl analogues, or fentanyl precursor chemicals. However, in March 2025, officials from the U.S. Border Patrol Canine Academy told us that they are working with CBP's Laboratories and Scientific Services to develop a training aid so the academy may begin training all new canine teams to detect fentanyl hydrochloride.

physical inspection.³⁴ Figure 8 shows selected non-intrusive inspection equipment and the resulting scans that CBP officials review for anomalies that may require further inspection. Our analysis of DHS seizure data shows that from fiscal years 2021 through 2024, non-intrusive inspection equipment contributed to at least 1,030 fentanyl-related seizures at ports of entry resulting in about 20,400 pounds of fentanyl, 290 pounds of fentanyl precursor chemicals, and 1,370 pieces of production equipment seized. Over the same period, non-intrusive inspection equipment was used in at least one fentanyl seizure at an immigration checkpoint resulting in about 150 pounds seized.

³⁴We have ongoing work examining CBP's non-intrusive inspection program, including the deployment, use, and performance of these systems, and plan to report on the results of that work later in 2025.

Figure 8: Selected Non-Intrusive Inspection Equipment Used by CBP and Resulting Images

Equipment

Resulting image



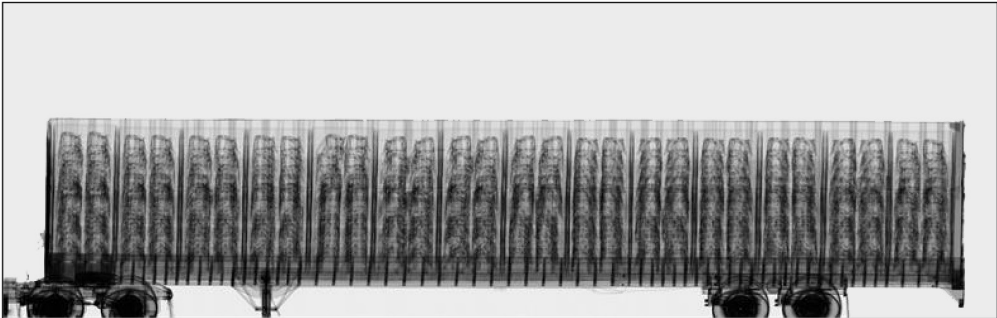
Z-portals scan passenger vehicles and buses.



Passenger vehicle scan showing indicators of contraband smuggling.



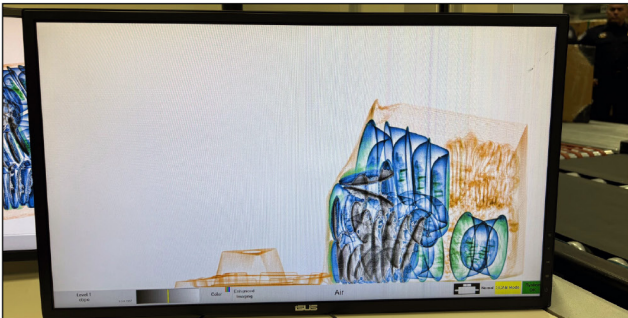
Multi-energy portals scan commercial tractor trailers.



Commercial tractor trailer scan showing indicators of contraband smuggling.



Baggage scanners scan baggage, packages, and other materials.



Package scan showing contents of a package.

Source: GAO (photos); Top right and middle right photos courtesy of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). | GAO-25-107667

Examples of CBP Special Operations to Combat Fentanyl Trafficking

During fiscal years 2021 through 2024, CBP conducted multiple special operations. For example, between March and May 2023, CBP conducted two concurrent operations—Blue Lotus and Four Horsemen—that provided additional personnel for inspections and interdiction efforts at and between ports of entry in California and Arizona.

Between May and September 2023, CBP conducted two more concurrent operations—Rolling Wave and Artemis. Rolling Wave surged personnel and resources to checkpoints in the southwest border region. Artemis deployed multidisciplinary interagency teams to strategic locations and leveraged information obtained through prior operations to target the illicit fentanyl supply chain.

In addition, from August 2023 to March 2024, CBP implemented Operation Argus, which provided trade-focused intelligence and analysis in support of Artemis and Homeland Security Investigation’s Operation Blue Lotus 2.0 (described later in this report).

Lastly, in April 2024, CBP implemented Operation Plaza Spike to disrupt Mexico-based plazas, which are key points in the illicit fentanyl supply chain. Plazas are territories controlled by a cartel often located directly south of a U.S. border crossing. The first two phases of this operation targeted plazas south of Nogales, Arizona and El Paso, Texas.

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) information. | GAO-25-107667

Patrols and Surveillance. CBP's Border Patrol and AMO are the uniformed law enforcement components responsible for securing U.S. borders between ports of entry in the air, land, and maritime environments. For example, to detect and prevent the illegal trafficking of people, drugs, and contraband into the country, Border Patrol agents patrol international land borders and waterways and AMO interdiction agents use aircrafts and vessels to conduct surveillance and investigative activities. Our analysis of DHS seizure data shows that from fiscal years 2021 through 2024, Border Patrol conducted about 400 fentanyl seizures in areas surrounding ports of entry resulting in almost 3,900 pounds seized. Over the same period, AMO assisted other agencies with about 10 fentanyl seizures in areas surrounding ports of entry resulting in about 9 pounds seized.³⁵

Special Operations. During fiscal years 2021 through 2024, CBP conducted 10 special operations to combat fentanyl trafficking. These operations provide additional personnel and tools to support inspections and patrol activities in select locations. For example, in October 2023, CBP implemented Operation Apollo, its national counter-fentanyl operation. This operation had three phases—California, Arizona, and El Paso, Texas—and focused on collecting and sharing intelligence and developing and leveraging partnerships with federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial agencies to target the smuggling of fentanyl into the U.S.

HSI Investigates Fentanyl Cases at and Beyond the Border and Conducts Special Operations

HSI combats fentanyl trafficking by investigating bad actors and transnational criminal organizations. These investigations are supported by efforts to target the methods and individuals involved in trafficking fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment into the U.S. Additionally, HSI conducts special operations to disrupt fentanyl-related supply chains.

Investigations. HSI investigates individual seizures made by CBP at the border and conducts larger, more-complex investigations into transnational criminal organizations involved in producing or trafficking fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment. On average, from fiscal years 2021 through 2024, HSI initiated over 2,100 fentanyl-related cases annually.³⁶ Over that same period, on average, HSI made over 3,600 fentanyl-related criminal arrests and obtained almost 1,400 fentanyl-related convictions annually.³⁷ Furthermore, HSI investigations resulted in, on average, 66 disruptions and 10 dismantlements of transnational

³⁵Areas surrounding ports of entry include immigration checkpoints and locations along the border between ports of entry. See appendix II for our full analysis of fentanyl-related seizures on which AMO and other DHS components provided assistance to another agency for fiscal years 2021 through 2024.

³⁶The number of fentanyl-related cases HSI initiated ranged from 1,595 in fiscal year 2021 to 2,760 in fiscal year 2023.

³⁷The number of fentanyl-related criminal arrests HSI made ranged from 2,903 in fiscal year 2021 to 4,114 in fiscal year 2023. The number of fentanyl-related convictions HSI obtained ranged from 969 in fiscal year 2021 to 1,568 in fiscal year 2023.

criminal organizations involved in producing or trafficking fentanyl each year from fiscal years 2021 through 2024.³⁸

Examples of HSI Special Operations to Combat Fentanyl Trafficking

During fiscal years 2021 through 2024, HSI conducted multiple special operations. For example, HSI conducted Operations Hydra and Chain Breaker, which targeted the illicit shipment of chemicals and equipment needed to produce fentanyl from foreign locations to the U.S.

In addition, from June to July 2023, HSI implemented Operation Blue Lotus 2.0, which targeted fentanyl distribution networks along the southwest border and within the U.S. interior. During this operation, HSI surged personnel to strengthen field interdiction, enforcement, and investigative efforts at ports of entry and major international commercial express consignment centers.

Source: GAO analysis of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) information. | GAO-25-107667

To support its investigative work, HSI targets the methods and individuals involved in producing or trafficking fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment. HSI has a unit at CBP's National Targeting Center that targets the trafficking of fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment within the commercial air and maritime transportation systems. This unit analyzes shipping data to identify suspicious shipments and information from HSI and CBP seizures to identify the individuals and organizations involved in producing or trafficking fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment. HSI's targeting efforts also support CBP interdiction efforts because HSI officials may place "lookouts" on individuals or shipments in CBP systems.

Special Operations. During fiscal years 2021 through 2024, HSI conducted four special operations focused on disrupting fentanyl-related supply chains. For example, in August 2023, HSI implemented Operation Opioid Response and Investigation of Networks, its nationwide counter-opioid initiative. Through this operation, HSI targets actors engaged in fentanyl distribution via the internet and plans surges of people to support task forces focused on fentanyl supply reduction and joint operations with CBP at ports of entry.

Collaboration Enhances CBP and HSI Efforts to Combat Fentanyl Trafficking

CBP and HSI collaborate with other federal agencies, state and local law enforcement, and other countries to combat fentanyl trafficking. According to CBP and HSI, partnerships with other federal, state, local, and foreign law enforcement agencies are critical to their efforts to interdict fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment, and disrupt fentanyl-related supply chains. See table 2 for specific examples.

³⁸These statistics represent the number of significant fentanyl-related HSI investigations that resulted in disruption and dismantlement. According to ICE, to be considered significant, the investigation must involve high-threat transnational drug-trafficking organizations or individuals that (1) are or have links to a Consolidated Priority Organizational Target or Regional Priority Organizational Target as designated by the Department of Justice, or (2) earn, launder, or move more than \$10 million a year in drug proceeds. ICE defines a disruption as anything that impedes the normal and effective operation of the targeted organization. ICE defines a dismantlement as anything that destroys the organization's leadership, financial base, and network to the degree that the organization is incapable of operating or reconstructing itself. The number of significant fentanyl-related HSI investigations that resulted in a disruption ranged from 23 in fiscal year 2021 to 118 in fiscal year 2024. The number of significant fentanyl-related HSI investigations that resulted in a dismantlement ranged from one in fiscal year 2021 to 25 in fiscal year 2023.

Table 2: Examples of CBP and HSI Collaboration with Other Agencies and Countries to Combat the Trafficking of Illicit Fentanyl, its Precursor Chemicals, and Production Equipment

	Other federal agencies	State and local law enforcement agencies	Other countries
CBP	CBP's fentanyl targeting unit at the National Targeting Center (NTC) includes staff from other federal agencies such as the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and Department of Defense. CBP's California and Arizona Regional Intelligence Centers share information on targets for counter-fentanyl efforts with federal partners such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). CBP's San Diego and Tucson Air and Marine Operations Branches provide air support to DEA, FBI, and other federal agencies on fentanyl interdiction efforts.	The National Guards of California and Arizona provided members to help guide travelers through the CBP inspection process at ports of entry and support field intelligence units. CBP field units in California and Arizona participate in highway interdiction efforts with state and local law enforcement. In addition, CBP field units share information on seizures and targets and provide air support to state and local law enforcement.	CBP offices, such as the NTC, Office of Trade, and Office of Intelligence share information about fentanyl trafficking with other countries. Officials from one Border Patrol sector told us they conduct mirrored patrols with Mexican law enforcement in high-risk areas along the border on a weekly basis. In addition, the sector's Foreign Operations Branch shares information about fentanyl trafficking with Mexico. CBP works with other countries to assess and improve fentanyl detection capabilities within their canine programs.
HSI	HSI works with other federal agencies on Operation Hydra, which targets fentanyl precursor chemicals, and Operation Chain Breaker, which targets production equipment. For example, HSI works with the U.S. Postal Service to target inbound pill presses. At Arizona ports of entry, HSI and CBP collaborate on fentanyl seizures and investigative efforts through Joint Port Enforcement Groups.	HSI works with state and local law enforcement agencies through its Border Enforcement Security Task Forces (BEST) and Fentanyl Abatement Suppression Teams (FAST). BESTs investigate a wide range of criminal activity including fentanyl trafficking and are located along the northern and southwest land borders and at sea and airports. FASTs focus on identifying and disrupting fentanyl distribution networks across the U.S.	HSI has Transnational Criminal Investigative Units composed of vetted and trained local law enforcement officers based in several countries. These units identify targets and share information with HSI to help prosecute members of transnational criminal organizations. Through Operation Hydra, HSI works with the Mexican military on efforts to seize fentanyl precursor chemicals and take down covert fentanyl labs. HSI also works with other countries to disrupt the fentanyl precursor chemical supply chain.

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) information. | GAO-25-107667

DHS Analyzes and Reports Data on Its Efforts to Combat Fentanyl Trafficking but Lacks the Goals and Measures Needed to Fully Assess Effectiveness

DHS and Its Components Analyze and Report Data on Their Efforts to Combat Fentanyl Trafficking

DHS and its components analyze and report a variety of data related to their efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking. For example, DHS has a public webpage that describes its efforts to combat fentanyl and presents fiscal year 2024 data on the pounds of fentanyl and number of pill presses seized, number of people connected to criminal fentanyl networks arrested, and number of drug-related HSI investigations initiated.

In addition, DHS's Office of Homeland Security Statistics publishes fiscal year data on four measures related to CBP and HSI efforts to disrupt the flow of illicit fentanyl into the U.S. The four measures are (1) pounds of fentanyl seized by CBP and HSI; (2) number of drug-producing devices seized by CBP and HSI; (3) dollar

value of U.S. cash and currency seized by HSI during fentanyl disruption operations; and (4) dollar value of personal property seized by HSI during fentanyl disruption operations.³⁹ Officials from the Office of Homeland Security Statistics told us that they plan to develop and report on additional measures in the future—specifically, fentanyl precursor chemical seizures and fentanyl-related arrests, indictments, and convictions. They explained that fentanyl precursor chemicals are a key focus for DHS and that arrests, indictments, and convictions are important for understanding DHS’s effectiveness at disrupting illicit activity. The office also develops internal dashboards to provide monthly updates to DHS leadership on the four measures as well as arrests.

CBP also analyzes and reports a variety of data on its efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking. For example, CBP has public dashboards that include fiscal year data on the number of fentanyl seizure events and pounds of fentanyl seized by CBP and the number of doses and value of fentanyl seized by OFO. According to CBP’s dashboard, in fiscal years 2023 and 2024, OFO seized over 40,000 pounds of fentanyl, which CBP equated to over 2 billion doses and valued at roughly \$137 million. CBP also analyzes and internally reports fentanyl-related arrests and seizures of fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment. Furthermore, CBP monitors overdose deaths and the street value of fentanyl to better understand the effectiveness of its efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking. Lastly, according to CBP officials, the Fentanyl Campaign Directorate regularly collects information to assess progress made toward the goals and objectives of CBP’s *Strategy to Combat Fentanyl and Other Synthetic Drugs*.

HSI analyzes and internally reports data on its efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking. For example, HSI develops an internal report that includes monthly data on national investigative activity related to fentanyl. Specifically, the report includes data on fentanyl-related arrests, and personal property, U.S. currency, and production equipment seizures, among other things. In addition, according to HSI officials, the Narcotics and Contraband Smuggling Unit holds monthly meetings to review progress made on efforts related to its *Strategy for Combating Illicit Opioids*.

DHS Has Not Established a Program to Collect Data and Develop Effectiveness Measures for Efforts to Combat Fentanyl Trafficking

DHS has not established a program to collect data and develop measures to assess the effectiveness of efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking into the U.S. (hereafter referred to as the data and measures program), as required by the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023.⁴⁰ As a result, DHS’s ability to fully understand the effectiveness of these efforts is limited. More specifically, the Act requires the Secretary of Homeland Security to establish a program to collect data and develop measures to assess how technologies and strategies used by DHS and other relevant federal agencies have helped combat the trafficking of illicit fentanyl, including its analogues and precursor chemicals, into the U.S. at and between ports

³⁹DHS’s Office of Homeland Security Statistics reports on these measures in its quarterly *National Fentanyl Disruption Seizure* report, which it first issued in August 2024. We describe a limitation of these measures for assessing the effectiveness of DHS’s efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking later in the report.

⁴⁰Pub. L. No. 117-263, div. G, title LXXI, subtitle D, § 7136(b), 136 Stat. 2395, 3650-51 (classified at 6 U.S.C. § 225(b)). In this report, for the purpose of readability, we use the term “measures” which we and the Office of Management and Budget have found to be generally interchangeable with “metrics,” the term used in the Act.

of entry. It also requires DHS to report to Congress based on the data collected and measures developed by the program.⁴¹

DHS delegated the responsibility for establishing the data and measures program and the related reporting requirement to CBP. Specifically, DHS first delegated the reporting requirement to CBP in October 2023. In August 2024, after DHS submitted its first report to Congress, CBP officials told us that DHS advised them that the agency was also responsible for establishing the data and measures program. However, in October 2024, CBP officials told us that CBP should not be responsible for establishing the program because it does not have visibility into the measures of other relevant agencies, such as HSI, or access to other agencies' data.

DHS's first report to Congress on its efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking, which was drafted by CBP, primarily described CBP efforts and provided more limited information on DHS's or other components' efforts.⁴² In particular, the report did not contain data or measures related to the efforts of other DHS components, such as HSI. In December 2024, DHS officials told us that CBP would have to confer with DHS if it wants another entity to take responsibility for establishing the data and measures program. As of April 2025, DHS had not informed us that it reassigned the responsibility for establishing the program or addressed CBP's lack of access to the information needed to develop and assess effectiveness measures.

As stated earlier, DHS's Office of Homeland Security Statistics currently analyzes and reports data on four measures related to DHS fentanyl disruption operations. While these measures are helpful for understanding DHS's efforts, their usefulness for assessing effectiveness is limited because the measures do not reflect indicators that CBP and HSI officials told us are helpful for understanding effectiveness. For example, CBP and HSI officials told us that overdose deaths, street price, and disruptions and dismantlements of transnational criminal organizations are helpful for understanding the effectiveness of efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking.⁴³ Furthermore, officials from DHS's Office of Homeland Security Statistics told us that the office is not responsible for establishing the required data and measures program. They explained that the office began reporting data on the measures to provide the public with official, validated statistics on DHS fentanyl disruption efforts.

DHS's efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking are collaborative in nature because multiple agencies—primarily CBP and HSI—conduct and maintain information on these efforts. According to our leading practices for interagency collaboration, participants in a collaborative effort—in this case, DHS, CBP, and HSI—should work together to define common outcomes they want to achieve, such as agreed-upon goals and measures.⁴⁴ Furthermore, participants should ensure that the data and information needed to assess progress toward those outcomes is accessible. Our prior work on these leading practices also found that collaborative efforts benefit

⁴¹6 U.S.C. § 225(b). The Act requires the Secretary of Homeland Security, in consultation with the Attorney General, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and the Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, to (1) establish a program to collect data and develop measures to assess the effectiveness of technologies and strategies used to detect and deter illicit fentanyl, including its analogues and precursor chemicals, from being trafficked into the U.S. at and between ports of entry, and (2) submit to Congress a report that is based on the data collected and measures developed by the required program 1 year after the enactment of the Act and every 2 years thereafter.

⁴²CBP, *Fentanyl and Fentanyl Precursor Chemicals: Fiscal Year 2023 Report to Congress* (Washington, D.C.: June 12, 2024).

⁴³We describe various challenges with assessing the effectiveness of efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking, including challenges with using some of these indicators, and strategies for overcoming those challenges later in the report.

⁴⁴[GAO-23-105520](#).

from identifying the appropriate leadership model (e.g., one agency or person, or assigning shared leadership) and clarifying roles and responsibilities.

By establishing the data and measures program, DHS would address a statutory requirement and be better positioned to assess the effectiveness of efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking into the U.S. Furthermore, ensuring that the entity or entities it tasks with establishing the program have access to information from across the department, including from relevant components, would enable DHS to develop measures that reflect the outcomes that DHS and its components want to achieve and assess progress toward those outcomes.

DHS Has Strategic Goals for Its Efforts to Combat Fentanyl Trafficking but Has Not Developed Related Performance Goals and Measures

In addition to not establishing the statutorily required data and measures program, DHS has not developed performance goals and measures that relate to its long-term strategic goals for its efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking. As a result, DHS's ability to assess progress toward its strategic goals is limited.

DHS established the following long-term strategic goals for its efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking in its *Plan to Combat Fentanyl* and a July 2023 memorandum for operational components regarding the implementation of the plan:

- Reduce the amount of illicit fentanyl entering the U.S. and disrupt the illicit fentanyl market by disrupting and degrading transnational criminal organizations' networks.
- Commercially disrupt global illicit fentanyl production and the trafficking supply chain to halt the flow of fentanyl and their precursor chemicals and save lives.

DHS's *Plan to Combat Fentanyl* describes four lines of effort— (1) precursor chemicals, (2) pill presses and parts, (3) movement, and (4) proceeds—and actions for each line of effort. However, the plan does not include performance goals and measures that link back to DHS's strategic goals for its efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking.

According to DHS, the primary purpose of the *Plan to Combat Fentanyl* was to operationalize DHS's responsibilities found in the National Security Council's *Strategic Implementation Plan to Commercially Disrupt the Illicit Fentanyl Supply Chain*. Officials from the office responsible for implementing DHS's plan confirmed that they did not establish any performance goals and measures related to DHS's strategic goals for its efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking. These officials explained that they did not establish performance goals and measures for DHS's strategic goals because they were working towards the goals and measures included in the National Security Council's plan. While the National Security Council's plan includes a strategic goal, multiple strategic objectives, and output- and outcome-oriented performance measures for the plan's action items, these goals, objectives, and measures define the results the federal government wants to achieve, not the specific results that DHS wants to achieve through its own efforts.

According to DHS's *Organizational Performance Management Guidance*, programs should use various types of performance measures (e.g., outcome-, output-, process-oriented) with target levels of performance for the fiscal year—or performance goals—to tell the story of how a program is achieving high-level mission goals and

contributing to the accomplishment of DHS strategy.⁴⁵ According to our guide on evidence-based policymaking, to ensure that an agency can assess progress toward its long-term goals, it should break those goals down into one or more related performance goals that define the specific results the agency expects to achieve in the near-term.⁴⁶ The guide also states that performance goals help direct an organization's activities and allow decision-makers, staff, and stakeholders to assess performance by comparing planned and actual results. Furthermore, a key practice of results-oriented performance management that we identified in our prior work is establishing one or more performance measures for each performance goal to collect relevant information to assess program performance and progress toward the goal.⁴⁷

DHS, CBP, and HSI officials we met with described various challenges with assessing the effectiveness of efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking. For example,

- DHS officials explained that outputs related to DHS enforcement, such as arrests and seizures, are not clear signs of effectiveness. For example, an increase in the number of fentanyl seizures could be a sign of more effective enforcement or increased supply.
- CBP and HSI officials said it is difficult to determine the discrete impact of their agencies' efforts on broader outcomes (e.g., drug prices and overdose deaths) because improvements could be attributed to other factors, such as increased drug education or access to overdose reversal medicine.
- CBP officials also told us that the lack of an estimate for total illicit fentanyl production makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of efforts to reduce the supply of illicit fentanyl. These officials explained that total illicit production cannot be estimated because fentanyl can be produced in a small, enclosed space (e.g., a basement), using a few chemicals in relatively small amounts and some basic tools. These officials added that fentanyl and its precursor chemicals do not spoil so they can be stored indefinitely, and new precursor chemicals are constantly being developed.

DHS's *Organizational Performance Management Guidance* states that measuring the effectiveness of DHS efforts to prevent or deter bad things from happening can be challenging because there is often no clear causation between the lack of something occurring and DHS's efforts. According to DHS's guidance, to develop useful goals, programs need to consider what event it is trying to prevent, what activities are in place to prevent it from happening, and how to measure how well those activities are working. The guidance also states that "proxy" goals—an indirect way to measure progress toward a closely-related outcome that the program is trying to achieve—are often needed for programs with a prevention mission.⁴⁸ DHS's guidance

⁴⁵Section 5.0 – *DHS Organizational Performance Management Guidance*. According to the Office of Management and Budget and Government Performance Results Act of 1993, a performance goal comprises a measure, a target, and a time frame. This is the term that most federal agencies use to assess and report performance. However, DHS uses the term performance measure instead of performance goal to distinguish its performance measures from high-level mission goals.

⁴⁶[GAO-23-105460](#).

⁴⁷See [GAO/GGD-96-118](#). In our prior work, we identified three key steps and additional practices within each step that federal agencies can implement to improve their overall performance. The steps and practices identified within this guide were drawn from our previous studies of leading public sector organizations that were successfully pursuing management reform initiatives and becoming more results-oriented.

⁴⁸For example, according to the National Security Council's *Strategic Implementation Plan to Commercially Disrupt the Illicit Fentanyl Supply Chain*, the cost per unit of fentanyl in the U.S. is a proxy or indirect way to measure the domestic supply of illicit fentanyl. The plan states that an increase in the cost per unit of fentanyl is a sign that supply has decreased.

recommends that programs have a number of proxy goals, in addition to other types of goals that represent the layered security or enforcement measures that are in place.

By establishing performance goals that relate to the outcomes reflected in its strategic goals for its efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking, DHS and other stakeholders would be better able to assess the department's progress toward disrupting the illicit fentanyl market and the flow of fentanyl into the U.S. Furthermore, by establishing measures for its performance goals, which could be developed through the statutorily required program discussed above, DHS would be better positioned to collect the information it needs to assess program performance and progress towards its goals.

Conclusions

Each year, tens of thousands of Americans die from fentanyl overdoses. DHS plays a key role in preventing fentanyl overdose as the lead agency for federal efforts to combat the trafficking of fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment into the country. DHS, through its components, conducts various efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking including inspections of incoming travelers and shipments, investigations into transnational criminal organizations, and collaboration with federal, state, local, and foreign law enforcement partners.

DHS analyzes and reports data on its efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking. However, additional actions are needed to fully assess the effectiveness of its efforts. Specifically, DHS has not established a program to collect data and develop measures to assess the effectiveness of efforts to combat the trafficking of fentanyl, including its analogues and precursor chemicals, into the U.S., as required by law. DHS tasked CBP with establishing this program, but CBP does not have access to the information it needs to do so, such as other components' data and measures. By establishing the program and ensuring that the entity or entities it tasks with doing so has access to the necessary information, DHS would satisfy a statutory requirement and be better positioned to develop and assess effectiveness measures that reflect the outcomes that DHS and its components want to achieve.

Additionally, DHS has not developed performance goals and measures related to the strategic goals for its efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking. Developing performance goals related to its strategic goals would better enable DHS and stakeholders to assess the department's progress toward disrupting the illicit fentanyl market and halting the flow of fentanyl into the U.S. Furthermore, establishing measures for its performance goals, which could be developed through the statutorily required program, would help ensure that DHS collects the information it needs to assess program performance and progress towards its goals.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making the following three recommendations to DHS:

The Secretary of Homeland Security should establish a program to collect data and develop measures to assess the effectiveness of technologies and strategies used to detect and deter illicit fentanyl, including its analogues and precursor chemicals, from being trafficked into the U.S. at and between ports of entry, as required by law. (Recommendation 1)

The Secretary of Homeland Security should ensure that the entity or entities the department tasks with establishing the required program have access to the necessary information from across the department. (Recommendation 2)

The Secretary of Homeland Security should establish performance goals and measures that relate to DHS's strategic goals for its efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking. (Recommendation 3)

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to DHS for review and comment. In its comments, reproduced in appendix III, DHS concurred with each of our recommendations. DHS also noted that it plans to take steps to address each of the recommendations. Specifically, DHS stated that it will establish the statutorily required data and measures program, which will involve identifying where the program should be situated—within a component or headquarters office—and implementing a mechanism, such as a directive, to ensure that the entity or entities tasked with establishing the program have access to the necessary information from across the department. Furthermore, DHS stated that it will develop performance goals and measures that relate to the strategic goals for its efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking. DHS also provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees and the Secretary of DHS, Commissioner of CBP, and Acting Director of ICE. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <https://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions, please contact me at GamblerR@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made major contributions to this report are listed in appendix IV.

//SIGNED//

Rebecca Gambler
Director, Homeland Security and Justice

List of Committees

The Honorable Ted Cruz
Chairman
The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
United States Senate

The Honorable Rand Paul, M.D.
Chairman
The Honorable Gary C. Peters
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
Chairman
The Honorable Richard J. Durbin
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate

The Honorable Brett Guthrie
Chairman
The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce
House of Representatives

The Honorable Andrew Garbarino
Chairman
The Honorable Bennie G. Thompson
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security
House of Representatives

The Honorable Jim Jordan
Chairman
The Honorable Jamie Raskin
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
House of Representatives

The Honorable Brian Babin
Chairman
The Honorable Zoe Lofgren

Letter

Ranking Member
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
House of Representatives

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

The James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 included a provision for us to review the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) efforts to collect data and develop measures to assess the effectiveness of technologies and strategies used to detect and deter illicit fentanyl, including its analogues and precursor chemicals, from being trafficked into the U.S. at and between ports of entry.¹ This report examines (1) what DHS data show about seizures of illicit fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment from fiscal years 2021 through 2024; (2) DHS efforts to combat the trafficking of illicit fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment into the U.S.; and (3) the extent to which DHS has assessed the effectiveness of its efforts to combat the trafficking of illicit fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment into the U.S.²

To describe what DHS data show about seizures of illicit fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment from fiscal years 2021 through 2024, we analyzed data on seizures of fentanyl, its analogues and precursor chemicals, and production equipment that occurred during the selected time frame from U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) SEACATS and U.S. Border Patrol's e3.³ We selected the fiscal year 2021 through 2024 time frame for our analysis because CBP officials told us they started collecting more precise data on production equipment seizures in fiscal year 2021 and fiscal year 2024 is the most recent year for which complete data were available at the time of our review. Regarding our analysis of the SEACATS data, we only analyzed records that had quantifiable amounts and were not identified as samples or residue. As a result, we excluded 3,884 records from our analysis, which represented about 16 percent of the dataset we received.

To assess the reliability of the SEACATS and e3 seizure data, we performed electronic testing, reviewed information about the systems, compared the data to CBP's public reports, and interviewed agency officials. When we found discrepancies—such as missing data, duplicate records, or data entry errors—we worked with officials from CBP and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) to correct the discrepancies. For example, we reclassified 15 SEACATS records that were incorrectly

¹Pub. L. No. 117-263, div. G, title LXXI, subtitle D, § 7136(b)(4)(B), 136 Stat. 2395, 3651 (classified at 6 U.S.C. § 225(b)(4)(B)). In this report, for the purpose of readability, we use the term "measures" which we and the Office of Management and Budget have found to be generally interchangeable with "metrics," the term used in the Act. A fentanyl analogue is a synthetic opioid with chemical structures related to fentanyl. A precursor chemical is any chemical substance that may be used in any part of the manufacturing process of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances such as fentanyl and fentanyl analogues.

²We are including production equipment in our scope because DHS has focused its interdiction efforts on the tools needed to make fentanyl, such as pill press machines and parts and die molds. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, drug traffickers use pill presses to press fentanyl into pills and punches and die molds to imprint markings and logos onto those pills to produce pills that look like legitimate prescription medication.

³SEACATS is the official system of record for tracking all drug seizures made by CBP and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI). CBP extracted and provided the SEACATS data in November 2024 and provided updates to those data in January 2025. Border Patrol's e3 is an application used to collect and transmit data related to its law enforcement activities, including drug seizures. Border Patrol extracted and provided the e3 data in January 2025. The data we analyzed from Border Patrol's e3 represented seizures on which Border Patrol provided assistance to another law enforcement agency. Border Patrol agents record seizures in e3 and then transfer those data to SEACATS. According to Border Patrol officials, agents are required to transfer all Border Patrol drug seizures into SEACATS but do not typically transfer seizures on which Border Patrol assisted another agency conducting a seizure. Of the 1,066 records we received from Border Patrol's e3, 437 had been transferred to SEACATS. Since we also analyzed SEACATS data, we did not include these 437 records in our analysis of the e3 data.

entered as HSI-led seizures that took place outside of the U.S., as HSI-assisted seizures. Further, we removed an additional 216 SEACATS records, which was about 1 percent of the dataset we received, based on electronic tests and our discussions with agency officials.⁴

We found these data to be sufficiently reliable for the purpose of describing the total amount and number of fentanyl, fentanyl analogue, fentanyl precursor chemical, and production equipment seizures led and assisted by DHS and each of the DHS components with primary responsibility for combating drug trafficking at and between U.S. ports of entry—CBP’s Office of Field Operations (OFO), Border Patrol, and Air and Marine Operations (AMO), and HSI—for fiscal years 2021 through 2024.⁵ The number and amount of fentanyl seizures we report include seizures of fentanyl analogues because DHS entities seized or helped other agencies seize a relatively small amount of fentanyl analogues from fiscal years 2021 through 2024.⁶ See below for further details on our analysis of SEACATS and e3 seizure data.

To describe DHS efforts to combat the trafficking of illicit fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment into the U.S., we reviewed documentation on DHS’s, CBP’s, and HSI’s counter-drug efforts, including DHS’s *Plan to Combat Fentanyl*, CBP’s *Strategy for Combating Fentanyl and Other Synthetic Drugs and Fentanyl and Fentanyl Precursor Chemicals: Fiscal Year 2023 Report to Congress*, and HSI’s *Strategy for Combating Illicit Opioids*. We also analyzed seizure and investigative data related to DHS efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking. Specifically, we analyzed the SEACATS data to identify seizures related to CBP’s efforts to patrol and surveil the border and its use of tools such as targeting, canines, and non-intrusive inspection equipment.⁷ We also analyzed summary-level data on fentanyl-related cases, indictments, arrests, convictions, disruptions, and dismantlements from fiscal years 2021 through 2024 from HSI’s Investigative Case Management system.⁸

As described above, we took numerous steps to assess the reliability of the SEACATS data. We found these data to be sufficiently reliable for the purpose of describing (1) the total weight and number of both Border

⁴We removed two outlier production equipment seizures of 1,000 and 3,000 gelatin capsules and 214 records that had a blank or inappropriate quantity (e.g., a pill press measured in kilograms).

⁵DHS led a seizure if a DHS entity was identified as the main seizing agency in SEACATS. DHS assisted a seizure if a DHS entity was identified as a participating agency and not the main seizing agency in SEACATS or e3. A DHS component led a seizure if it was identified as the main seizing agency in SEACATS. A component assisted on a seizure if the component was identified as a participating agency and not the main seizing agency in SEACATS or e3. CBP’s AMO supports the efforts of other DHS components and other federal, state, local, and foreign agencies, but does not lead drug interdiction efforts.

⁶DHS components led or assisted on about 80 seizures of fentanyl analogues resulting in about 180 pounds seized from fiscal years 2021 through 2024.

⁷CBP uses various types of non-intrusive inspection equipment to screen travelers, vehicles, and shipments coming into the U.S. This equipment includes small-scale handheld devices and large-scale systems designed to help CBP officials detect drugs and other illicit items without requiring them to conduct a physical inspection.

⁸HSI extracted and provided these data in January 2025. ICE defines a disruption as impeding the normal and effective operation of the targeted organization. ICE defines a dismantlement as destroying the organization’s leadership, financial base, and network to the degree that the organization is incapable of operating and/or reconstituting itself. Only significant HSI investigations may result in a disruption or dismantlement. According to ICE, to be considered significant, the investigation must involve high-threat transnational drug-trafficking organizations or individuals that (1) are or have links to a Consolidated Priority Organizational Target or Regional Priority Organizational Target as designated by the Department of Justice, or (2) earn, launder, or move more than \$10 million a year in drug proceeds. Data on disruptions and dismantlements are stored in HSI’s Investigative Case Management system, which is the official system of record used to initiate cases, identify case categories, and record and report substantive case information such as arrests, indictments, and convictions.

Patrol-led and AMO-assisted fentanyl seizures in areas surrounding ports of entry; and (2) the minimum amount and number of fentanyl, fentanyl analogue, fentanyl precursor chemical, and production equipment seizures that involved the use of targeting, canines, and non-intrusive inspection equipment from fiscal years 2021 through 2024. We report the minimum number of seizures and amount seized involving these tools because the fields in SEACATS that we reviewed to identify the use of these tools were not required to be completed or were free-text narratives. To assess the reliability of HSI's investigative data, we performed logic testing, reviewed information about the system, and interviewed agency officials. We found these data to be sufficiently reliable for the purpose of reporting the total and average annual number of fentanyl-related cases, indictments, arrests, convictions, disruptions, and dismantlements from fiscal years 2021 through 2024.

In addition, we interviewed CBP and HSI officials from headquarters and the field to better understand CBP and HSI efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking. At CBP headquarters, we interviewed officials from the Fentanyl Campaign Directorate, OFO, Office of Intelligence, Office of Trade, and the National Targeting Center.⁹ We also visited CBP's National Targeting Center to better understand the agency's efforts to target shipments of fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment and identify the organizations involved in trafficking, producing, and distributing these items. At HSI headquarters, we interviewed officials from the Narcotics and Contraband Smuggling Unit.

In the field, we interviewed CBP officials from California and Arizona including officials from three field offices; two centralized cargo examination sites; an international mail facility; three ports of entry; two Border Patrol sectors; two immigration checkpoints; two AMO branches; two regional intelligence centers; and the entity overseeing the implementation of CBP's Operation Apollo—the agency's national counter-fentanyl operation.¹⁰ We also interviewed HSI officials from California, Arizona, and Texas including officials from three field offices and two HSI operations focused on disrupting the fentanyl supply chain by targeting shipments of precursor chemicals and production equipment from China.¹¹

We conducted most of these interviews during in-person visits to Los Angeles and San Diego, California and Tucson, Arizona. During these visits, we observed CBP efforts and tools to combat fentanyl trafficking at three land ports of entry, an international mail facility, air and sea cargo examination facilities, and two immigration checkpoints. We selected San Diego and Tucson because, according to CBP's public drug seizure data, these locations had the greatest number of CBP fentanyl seizures and pounds of fentanyl seized in fiscal year 2023. We selected Los Angeles because the Acting CBP Commissioner at the time of our review identified the Los Angeles International Airport—which includes CBP international mail and cargo examination facilities—as the focal point in the agency's efforts to combat fentanyl precursor chemicals. The information we obtained from these interviews and visits cannot be generalized; however, it provided valuable insights on CBP and HSI efforts and tools to combat fentanyl trafficking.

⁹The Fentanyl Campaign Directorate is comprised of officials from OFO, Border Patrol, and AMO, and is responsible for overseeing efforts to implement CBP's counter-fentanyl strategy.

¹⁰Specifically, we met with CBP officials from the Los Angeles, San Diego, and Tucson Field Offices; Los Angeles Air-Centralized Examination Station and International Mail Facility; Los Angeles/Long Beach Seaport and Centralized Examination Site; Ports of San Ysidro, Otay Mesa, and Nogales; San Diego and Tucson Border Patrol Sectors; Brown Field Station and Interstate 19 immigration checkpoints; San Diego and Tucson AMO branches; and California and Arizona Regional Intelligence Centers.

¹¹Specifically, we met with HSI officials from the Los Angeles, San Diego, and Tucson Field Offices. Operation Hydra, which is based in Houston, Texas, targets the chemicals needed to produce fentanyl, and Operation Chain Breaker, which is based in El Paso, Texas, targets the equipment needed to produce fentanyl pills.

To determine the extent to which DHS assessed the effectiveness of its efforts to combat the trafficking of illicit fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment into the U.S., we reviewed DHS, CBP, and HSI documents describing agency goals, measures, and performance such as DHS's *Plan to Combat Fentanyl* and *Nationwide Fentanyl Disruption Seizure* report, as well as CBP's and HSI's implementation plans for their respective counter-fentanyl strategies. We also reviewed recent examples of internal data reports that DHS, CBP, and HSI developed to monitor their efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking.

In addition, we interviewed officials from DHS's Office of Program Analysis and Evaluation and Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans as well as the CBP and HSI headquarters and field officials cited above to better understand how each agency assesses the effectiveness of its efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking including any challenges officials experience. We evaluated DHS's efforts to assess its effectiveness at combating fentanyl trafficking against DHS's *Organizational Performance Management Guidance*, GAO's guide on evidence-based policymaking, and select key performance management practices identified in our prior work related to establishing performance measures.¹²

We also interviewed or obtained responses to questions from officials from DHS's Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans and Office of the Executive Secretary as well as CBP's OFO, Office of the Executive Secretariat, and Office of Congressional Affairs to determine the status of DHS's establishment of a statutorily required program to collect data and develop measures to assess the effectiveness of efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking into the U.S.¹³ We evaluated DHS's establishment of the required program against the applicable statutory provisions and select leading practices for interagency collaboration related to defining common outcomes, ensuring access to necessary data and information, identifying appropriate leadership models, and clarifying roles and responsibilities.¹⁴

Analysis of Fentanyl-Related Seizures Using DHS Data

We analyzed seizures of fentanyl, fentanyl analogues, fentanyl precursor chemicals, and production equipment that occurred during fiscal years 2021 through 2024 from SEACATS and e3. Specifically, we analyzed what and how much was seized, which agency led or assisted the seizure, where the seizure occurred, the method

¹²DHS, *Section 5.0 – DHS Organizational Performance Management Guidance*, (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 23, 2023). GAO, *Evidence-Based Policymaking: Practices to Help Manage and Assess the Results of Federal Efforts*, [GAO-23-105460](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 12, 2023). In our prior work, we identified three key steps and additional practices within each step that federal agencies can implement to improve their overall performance. See GAO, *Executive Guide: Effectively Implementing the Government Performance and Results Act*, [GAO/GGD-96-118](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 1996). The steps and practices identified within this guide were drawn from our previous studies of leading public sector organizations that were successfully pursuing management reform initiatives and becoming more results-oriented.

¹³Pub. L. No. 117-263, div. G, title LXXI, subtitle D, § 7136(b), 136 Stat. 2395, 3650-51 (classified at 6 U.S.C. § 225(b)). This Act requires the Secretary of Homeland Security, in consultation with the Attorney General, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and the Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, to (1) establish a program to collect data and develop measures to assess the effectiveness of technologies and strategies used to detect and deter illicit fentanyl, including its analogues and precursor chemicals, from being trafficked into the U.S. at and between ports of entry; and (2) submit to Congress a report that is based on the data collected and measures developed by the required program 1 year after the enactment of the Act and every 2 years thereafter.

¹⁴GAO, *Government Performance Management: Leading Practices to Enhance Interagency Collaboration and Address Crosscutting Challenges*, [GAO-23-105520](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 24, 2023).

by which the seized item was transported, where the seized item came from, and which tools were used to detect the seized item.

Analysis of What and How Much Was Seized and the Agency That Led the Seizure

We reviewed different fields in SEACATS and e3 to identify fentanyl, fentanyl analogues, fentanyl precursor chemicals, and production equipment. Specifically, to identify fentanyl and production equipment, we reviewed the property type field in SEACATS and property subtype field in e3.

To identify precursor chemicals and analogues in SEACATS, we searched for seizure records that (1) were annotated as a fentanyl precursor chemical, (2) contained the text “analog” in the property description field, or (3) contained a substance in the property description field which included the same text segments found in the names of fentanyl precursor chemicals and fentanyl analogues provided by CBP’s Laboratories and Scientific Services.¹⁵ The text segments we used reflected the core characters of potential fentanyl precursor chemicals and fentanyl analogues.

We manually reviewed each seizure record that met any of our three search criteria above and determined whether the seized substance was present on the lists provided by CBP’s Laboratories and Scientific Services or were identified as a fentanyl precursor chemical or fentanyl analogue by another federal agency, such as the Drug Enforcement Administration, or relevant international entity, such as the International Narcotics Control Board. We provided any substances that we could not independently determine were fentanyl precursor chemicals or fentanyl analogues to CBP’s Laboratories and Scientific Services for a determination.

We considered each item seized in SEACATS and e3 as a separate seizure, even if the items were seized during the same incident.¹⁶ We reported seizures of all fentanyl, fentanyl analogues, and fentanyl precursor chemicals—including powder and pills—in pounds. We reported seizures of production equipment (e.g., entire pill presses, die molds, and pill press parts) in pieces. Some seizures contained a mixture of different substances.¹⁷ In this report, we counted any seizures of mixed substances that contained fentanyl or a fentanyl analogue as a fentanyl seizure. The number and amount of seizures have a degree of uncertainty due to some manual entry into the systems. Consequently, we rounded reported numbers of seizures above 10 to the nearest 10 seizures. We also rounded reported pounds seized above 1,000 to the nearest 100 pounds and reported pounds seized between 10 and 1,000 to the nearest 10 pounds. Lastly, we rounded reported pieces of production equipment seized above 10 to the nearest 10 pieces. We did not round reported seizure amounts or events under 10.

¹⁵The data we received from Border Patrol’s e3 did not contain any seizures of fentanyl precursor chemicals or fentanyl analogues. CBP’s Laboratories and Scientific Services provided a list of fentanyl analogues that have been seen by Laboratories and Scientific Services and other U.S. and international forensics laboratories. It also provided a list of fentanyl precursor chemicals that it has identified in its confirmatory or presumptive testing that potentially could be related to illicit fentanyl production. This list included chemicals that officials determined could be used to make fentanyl. However, officials noted that they were not aware of any reports of illicit fentanyl production using those chemicals at the time they prepared the list.

¹⁶For example, if a Border Patrol agent seized fentanyl pills and a bag of fentanyl precursor chemicals during a traffic stop, we counted these as separate seizures.

¹⁷For example, a property description for a record in SEACATS may read “one 500-gram bag of fentanyl and precursor chemicals.”

To identify the agency that led a seizure, we reviewed the main seizing agency field in SEACATS. The SEACATS data we received included 36 different agency codes. We grouped these codes into seven agency categories and confirmed our categorization with CBP officials.¹⁸ DHS led a seizure if a DHS entity was identified as the main seizing agency in SEACATS. A DHS component led a seizure if it was identified as the main seizing agency in SEACATS.

To identify agencies that assisted with a seizure, we reviewed the participating agency field in SEACATS. The data we analyzed from Border Patrol's e3 represented seizures on which Border Patrol provided assistance to another law enforcement agency. DHS assisted with a seizure if a DHS entity was identified as a participating agency and not the main or lead seizing agency in SEACATS or e3. A DHS component assisted with a seizure if the component was identified as a participating agency and not the main or lead seizing agency in SEACATS or e3.

Analysis of Where an Item Was Seized, How It Was Transported, and Where It Came from

Seizure Location

We reviewed the place of seizure field in SEACATS to determine whether a DHS- or component-led seizure occurred at a CBP port of entry, Border Patrol immigration checkpoint, along the border between ports of entry, or within the U.S. interior.¹⁹ If the place of seizure field was blank, we assigned one of the location types above using a standard list of port codes developed by CBP. We confirmed our assignments with CBP officials. We reviewed other fields, such as the seizure location description and narrative, of any records that had a blank place of seizure field and for which we could not assign a location using port codes to determine a seizure location.

Seizure Region

To identify the region in which a seizure occurred, we first reviewed the area of responsibility field in SEACATS to identify the field office, Border Patrol sector, or AMO branch related to the seizure event. Then, using CBP's publicly reported data, which identifies a region for each area of responsibility, we assigned a region—northern border, coastal/interior, or southwest border—to each record in our dataset.

How a Seized Item Was Transported

We reviewed the conveyance method field in SEACATS to determine which method was used to transport a seized item into the U.S. The SEACATS data we received included 18 different conveyance method

¹⁸Our seven agency categories were: AMO, Border Patrol, HSI, OFO, other CBP, other DHS, and non-DHS.

¹⁹Ports of entry are facilities that provide for the controlled entry into, or departure from, the U.S. Specifically, a port of entry is any officially designated location (seaport, airport, or land border location) where CBP officers or employees clear travelers, goods, and other items, collect duties, and enforce customs laws; and where officers inspect persons applying for admission into, entering, or departing the U.S. pursuant to U.S. immigration and travel controls. According to Border Patrol, the purpose of immigration checkpoints is to detect and apprehend (1) removable people, including smuggled humans; (2) human and drug (or other contraband) smugglers; and (3) suspected terrorists attempting to travel into the interior of the U.S. after evading detection at the border.

description codes. We grouped these codes into six transportation categories and confirmed our categorization with CBP officials.²⁰

Where a Seized Item Came from

We reviewed the origin country field in SEACATS to determine where a seized item came from. Officials may identify the country of origin for a seized item in SEACATS. According to CBP officials, it is not possible to determine a synthetic drug's origin or point of manufacture with certainty. So, the country of origin field may not necessarily indicate the country in which a seized item was produced; it may indicate the country the seized item last traveled through. About a quarter (3,851) of the records we included in our analysis had an unknown country of origin.

Analysis of the Tools Used to Detect Seized Items

We used multiple analytical approaches to identify seizures that involved the use of tools such as targeting, canines, and non-intrusive inspection equipment to detect the seized item. For example, we reviewed relevant fields in SEACATS for the words "targeting," "canine," and "x-ray."

We confirmed our approaches for identifying seizures that involved targeting, canines, and non-intrusive inspection equipment with CBP officials. We report the minimum number of seizures and amounts involving these tools because the fields that we reviewed in SEACATS to identify the use of these tools were not required to be completed or were free-text narratives.

We conducted this performance audit from June 2024 to September 2025 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

²⁰Our six transportation categories were: passenger vehicle, commercial vehicle, mail (including express consignment), pedestrian, other, and no transportation involved.

Appendix II: Fentanyl-Related Seizures Assisted by Department of Homeland Security Components

The two primary Department of Homeland Security (DHS) components involved in combating the trafficking of illicit drugs into the U.S. are (1) U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and (2) U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).¹ Within CBP, three components—the Office of Field Operations (OFO), U.S. Border Patrol, and Air and Marine Operations (AMO)— have primary responsibility for border security, which includes seizing drugs discovered during inspections and operations in their various areas of responsibility. Within ICE, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) investigates the illicit movement of goods, including illicit drugs, into and out of the country.

OFO, Border Patrol, AMO, and HSI provide assistance to one another and other federal, state, local, and foreign agencies on efforts to combat the trafficking of illicit fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment into the U.S. Table 3 below shows the number and amount of fentanyl, fentanyl precursor chemical, and production equipment seizures on which OFO, Border Patrol, AMO, and HSI provided assistance to another agency, including other DHS components, for fiscal years 2021 through 2024.

Table 3: Number and Amount of Illicit Fentanyl, Fentanyl Precursor Chemical, and Production Equipment Seizures on Which DHS Components Assisted Another Agency, Fiscal Years 2021–2024									
		2021		2022		2023		2024	
	Component	Number of seizures	Amount	Number of seizures	Amount	Number of seizures	Amount	Number of seizures	Amount
Fentanyl (lb.) ^a	OFO	80	330	90	440	170	740	120	840
	Border Patrol	140	190	190	1,100	350	2,300	530	4,600
	AMO	200	1,500	280	1,600	320	1,600	200	2,300
	HSI	1,080	5,000	1,380	15,300	1,770	16,200	1,450	17,000
Fentanyl precursor chemicals (lb.) ^b	OFO	6	230	-	-	8	1,500	-	-
	Border Patrol	0	0	0	0	-	-	-	-
	AMO	6	230	-	-	1	370	-	-
	HSI	7	247,700	6	890	20	15,900	4	4,300
Production equipment (pieces) ^c	OFO	2	2	3	3	5	30	6	30
	Border Patrol	1	1	0	0	2	3	7	7
	AMO	5	7	0	0	3	3	1	1
	HSI	4	4	10	30	20	60	40	90

Source: GAO analysis of data from U.S. Customs and Border Protection’s (CBP) SEACATS and U.S. Border Patrol’s e3. I GAO-25-107667

¹⁶ U.S.C. §§ 211 (establishment of CBP), 252 (establishment of ICE). The U.S. Coast Guard, a multi-mission military service within DHS, leads maritime drug interdiction efforts and has broad legal authorities to conduct counterdrug missions. See, generally, 14 U.S.C. §§ 521-528 (lifesaving and law enforcement authorities); see also 6 U.S.C. § 468; 10 U.S.C. § 279. However, our review did not include the Coast Guard because the agency has reported few interdictions of fentanyl in the maritime environment. Further, we have ongoing work examining the Coast Guard’s drug and migrant interdiction efforts and plan to report on the results of that work later in 2025.

Appendix II: Fentanyl-Related Seizures Assisted by Department of Homeland Security Components

Notes: The data in the table relate to seizures on which a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) component provided assistance to another component or other federal, state, local, or foreign agency. A component assisted on a seizure if the component was identified as a participating agency and not the main seizing agency in SEACATS—the official system of record for tracking all CBP and Homeland Security Investigation (HSI) drug seizures—or Border Patrol’s e3, which it uses to collect and transmit data related to its law enforcement activities including drug seizures. Within CBP, three components—the Office of Field Operations (OFO), Border Patrol, and Air and Marine Operations (AMO)—have primary responsibility for border security, which includes drug interdiction efforts. The data for Border Patrol include data from SEACATS and e3. Border Patrol agents are required to transfer all Border Patrol drug seizures into SEACATS but do not typically transfer seizures on which Border Patrol assisted another agency. It is not appropriate to add data from different components because multiple components may assist another agency on the same seizure. We rounded amounts of pounds seized above 1,000 to the nearest 100 pounds and amounts between 10 and 1,000 to the nearest 10 pounds. We rounded amounts of production equipment seized above 10 to the nearest 10 pieces. We rounded numbers of seizures above 10 to the nearest 10 seizures.

^aThe amount of seized fentanyl represents the total weight of fentanyl powder, pills, and analogues, and may include other drugs or chemicals that were mixed with fentanyl or fentanyl analogues. The number of seizures represents the total number of seizures of fentanyl, fentanyl analogues, and other drugs or chemicals that were mixed with fentanyl or fentanyl analogues. DHS components assisted on the seizure of less than 8 pounds of fentanyl analogues from fiscal years 2021 through 2024.

^bThe amount of seized fentanyl precursor chemicals represents the weight of chemicals that are or could be used to produce illicit fentanyl, according to CBP’s Laboratories and Scientific Services, other federal agencies, and international entities. If a seizure contained fentanyl precursor chemicals and fentanyl or fentanyl analogues, we counted that seizure in our analysis of fentanyl seizures. A “-” means that all relevant seizures contained fentanyl or fentanyl analogues. From fiscal years 2021 through 2024, OFO and HSI assisted on eight and two seizures, respectively, of fentanyl precursor chemicals that also contained fentanyl or fentanyl analogues.

^cThe amount of seized production equipment represents the total number of pill presses, dies, and parts.

Appendix III: Comments from the Department of Homeland Security

By Electronic Submission

U.S. Department of Homeland Security Washington, DC 20528

July 15, 2025

Rebecca Gambler
Director, Homeland Security and Justice
U.S. Government Accountability
Office 441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548-0001

Re: Management Response to GAO-25-107667, "ILLICIT FENTANYL: DHS Has Various Efforts to Combat Trafficking but Could Better Assess Effectiveness"

Dear Ms. Gambler,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this draft report. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS, or the Department) appreciates the U.S. Government Accountability Office's work in planning and conducting its review and issuing this report.

DHS leadership is pleased to note Government Accountability Office's positive recognition of the Department's key role in preventing fentanyl overdose as the lead agency for federal efforts to combat the trafficking of fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment into the country. DHS remains committed to protecting the nation's security, public health, and economy, including efforts to secure the nation's borders against the trafficking of drugs.

Combatting illicit drug use and the flow of drugs within our borders is a priority for the Trump administration. A sustainable solution to the opioid crisis, fueled by the proliferation of illicit fentanyl and other synthetic drugs, requires coordination across all levels and sectors of government—including law enforcement, first responders, healthcare providers, community-based organizations, and individuals. Accordingly, DHS fully supports the Trump administration's drug policy priorities¹ to secure our borders, combat drug trafficking organizations, and disrupt the supply chain, including in source countries from which illicit drugs and precursor chemicals flow into the United States, as evidenced by our ongoing actions to implement Executive Order 141652 and other related Executive Orders. ³

The draft report contained three recommendations for DHS, with which the Department concurs. Enclosed find our detailed response to each recommendation. DHS previously submitted technical comments addressing several accuracy, contextual, and other issues under a separate cover for Government Accountability Office's consideration, as appropriate.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. We look forward to working with you again in the future

Sincerely,

Jeffrey M Bobich
Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Chief Financial Officer

Enclosure

Enclosure: Management Response to Recommendations Contained in GAO-25-107667

Government Accountability Office recommended that the Secretary of Homeland Security:

Recommendation 1: Establish a program to collect data and develop measures to assess the effectiveness of technologies and strategies used to detect and deter illicit fentanyl, including its analogues and precursor chemicals, from being trafficked into the U.S. at and between ports of entry, as required by law.

Response: Concur. As this recommendation is related to the "James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023,"⁴ it is important for readers to understand that the Department, through U.S. Customs and Border Protection, produced the "Fentanyl and Fentanyl Precursor Chemicals, Fiscal Year 2023 Report to Congress," dated June 12, 2024, pursuant to this 2023 National Defense Authorization Act. That report to Congress was based off existing DHS data such as suspected flows, purity, market price, and seizures of fentanyl and associated analogues and precursor chemicals. Furthermore, the report discussed the effectiveness of technologies and strategies that Customs and Border Protection uses to locate and interdict fentanyl, such as canines and non-intrusive inspection equipment.

However, DHS has not formally established an official program dedicated to the wider mission of developing measures to assess the effectiveness of technologies and strategies used to detect and deter fentanyl from being trafficked at and between ports of entry.

Accordingly, DHS-led by the Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans in coordination with other Components as appropriate-will conduct an evaluation to determine the optimal alignment of this program within the appropriate Component or headquarters office to achieve the Department's goals and objectives in combatting illicit drug use and the flow of drugs within our borders. Once the appropriate Component or headquarters office is identified, DHS will formally establish a program to collect data and develop measures to assess the effectiveness of technologies and strategies used to detect and deter illicit fentanyl, including its analogues and precursor chemicals, from being trafficked into the

U.S. at and between ports of entry. Estimated Completion Date: July 31, 2026.

Recommendation 2: Ensure that the entity or entities the department tasks with establishing the required program have access to the necessary information from across the department.

Response: Concur. As part of the effort described above to determine the appropriate alignment and establishment of the program to collect data and develop measures to assess the effectiveness of technologies and strategies used to detect and deter illicit fentanyl with a DHS Component or headquarters office, DHS will

consider and implement a mechanism, such as a directive, delegation, or other method to ensure that any entity or entities tasked with establishing the required program have access to the necessary information from across the Department. Estimated Completion Date: July 31, 2026.

Recommendation 3: Establish performance goals and measures that relate to DHS's strategic goals for its efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking.

Response: Concur. The Department currently collects, uses, and reports performance data on its strategic goals and activities to manage and improve mission delivery and meet statutory reporting requirements. DHS also currently engages in an annual measure improvement cycle, typically each summer, to refine how performance data is measured and reported. As part of this cycle, improvements are implemented at the start of each fiscal year in October. DHS-led by the Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans in coordination with other Components as appropriate-will develop and/or refine responsive measures that relate to DHS 's strategic goals for its efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking during the next annual measure improvement process. Estimated Completion Date: October 31, 2026.

¹ "ONDCP Releases Trump Administration's Statement of Drug Policy Priorities," dated April 3, 2025; See: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/articles/2025/04/ondcp-releases-ttmp-administrations-statement-of-dmg-policy-priorities>.

² Executive Order 14165, "Securing Our Borders," dated January 20, 2025; 90 FR 8467; See: <https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2025-02015>.

³ Executive Order 14193, "Imposing Duties To Address the Flow of Illicit Drugs Across Our Northern Border," dated February 1, 2025; 90 FR 9113; See: <https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2025-02406>; Executive Order 14194, "Imposing Duties To Address the Situation at Our Southern Border;" dated February 1, 2025; See: <https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2025-02407>; and Executive Order 14195, "Imposing Duties To Address the Synthetic Opioid Supply Chain in the People's Republic of China," dated February 1, 2025; 90 FR 9121; See: <https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2025-02408>.

⁴ Pub. L. No 117-263.

Appendix IV: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Rebecca Gambler at GamblerR@gao.gov.

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Kirk Kiester (Assistant Director), Matthew Lowney (Analyst in Charge), Christine Catanzaro, William Denekamp, Michele Fejfar, Eric Hauswirth, Sasan J. “Jon” Najmi, and John Yee made key contributions to this report.

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